

Good evening. Man, you guys are tired. Long day? How's it going out there? Good? Who likes this rain? Yeah, I for one do not. Well, I *do* like the rain. Here's the thing. I have a car that doesn't have AC, so rain spoils my fan plan. I might have to get a ride home if it's still raining, because I will be really wet. If you have your Bible, would you grab it and turn with me to Romans, chapter 12?

If you don't have a Bible, there should be one in the seatback in front of you. It should be one of these hard black ones right here. If you don't own a Bible, that is our gift to you. You can take that one home. If you want a better-looking one, as we always say, always try out Connection Central. Someone is bound to have forgotten a leather-bound Bible. You can go pick one out with someone's name on it. It's all yours.

We're going to be in Romans, chapter 12. As Beau said, my name is Tate Madzima. I am the children's minister here on staff, and I like to take the opportunity when I'm given it to plug children's ministry a little bit. If you guys don't know what children's ministry is or what we do, basically what we do on a weekly basis is teach the gospel to kids who are of elementary age, so from first through fifth grade.

We teach them the gospel. We teach them what it means to love the Lord, kind of in the same way we learn how to love the Lord when we come here for services. If you ever want to find out about Kids' Village or if you want to come check it out, let me know. I'll take you up to the second floor and show you what we do. I know one day I'm going to say this and 30 people are going to want to go up there with me, but we'll make it work. That's Kids' Village, and that's what I do on a weekly basis.

This summer we're in a sermon series entitled *The Dearest Place on Earth*. The whole idea of *The Dearest Place* is a sermon series on the church, not the building, but the people who make up the church of God. So as we talk about *The Dearest Place*, we're talking about this local congregation, this local body here in Denton.

A couple of weeks ago when Matt was talking about *The Dearest Place* and explaining what the church was, he used a term called the "one another" texts. He said in the New Testament there are 59 texts that tell us how to treat one another. They go like, "Love one another. Serve one another. Greet one another with a holy kiss," all that type of stuff.

The whole point of those texts is a prescriptive way believers everywhere are supposed to treat one another, how we're supposed to react when we see each other, how we're supposed to consider one another. Even though this sermon isn't exactly part of *The Dearest Place* sermon series, I didn't want to move too far away from what we've been discussing, what we've been learning.

So we're going to drill down a little bit deeply on what it means to love one another, how we can consider one another, like Brad talked about last week. He asked us the question when he started, "What is the attitude of church members to one another? How is the church supposed to live together?" He answered that question quite brilliantly from Philippians, chapter 2, where we read for us to consider one another, the attitude we're supposed to have toward one another is an attitude of consideration, an attitude of preferring one another above ourselves.

That goes for all believers everywhere because, as we read in Philippians, chapter 2, it tells us Jesus did not count equality with God as something to be grasped, but he laid that down, came, and lived on the earth for 33 years, and in living a perfect, sinless life, he was considering us sinners in need of a Savior more than he was considering himself. He lived that life, he died on the cross, so we could be ransomed and redeemed and called children of God.

In the same way Jesus considered us more than he considered himself, that mandate is pushed out on the church, pushed out on us, the believers who love and trust Jesus, to consider one another in the same way. So Brad started last week by saying the sermon really addresses the members of this church, and I'm going to say the same thing.

Really, the primary people I am talking to are the members of this church, this local body. We are going to learn together what it means to consider one another and how love anchors that for us. It doesn't mean if you're not a member of this church you can take a nap for the next 30 minutes. You might want to, but I'm going to try to keep you awake.

It means there's something else for you. If you are a believer who's a member of a different church, a believer who is an attender here and not really a member, what I want you to see from this is the fact that this love we're talking about is for all believers everywhere, and the context it works out best is the church. If you are a member of a different church, you can listen to this and hear what it means to love God and love others and take that to your home church wherever you're from and walk in that manner.

If you are a regular attender here or somewhere else, I would hope this would encourage you to become a member because there's a biblical obligation, as we've seen for the past few weeks, of membership to a church, because it gives you a sense of belonging, and that's what God designed the church to be. Even

those who aren't Christians, aren't believers, don't even know what I mean when I say "the gospel," don't know what I mean when I say believers, there's something here for you too, because we're going to discuss love. Everyone has heard that word. It has a meaning for each and every one of us.

Here's my hope. My hope is that you would discover what true love is like, what the true love of God means, because whatever love you want, whatever love you're looking for and searching for, you're about to discover along with us that God is the greatest love we could ever have. Those who are loved by God, known by God, and called his own experience this great, true, genuine, perfect love. The greatest love is found in the people known by him who is God and loved by God. So that's my hope for this as we start it.

You guys are at Romans 12, so we're going to read it. We'll start in verse 1 and read through the whole chapter. Whenever I start talking about this, we're going to go from verse 9 onwards, but I wanted to read from verse 1 all the way through just so you guys could see the full picture of what Paul is saying to the church at Rome, what he is instructing them and wanting them to get out of this. So you can read with me Romans, chapter 12, verse 1.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you that your Word is true and abiding and everlasting. We thank you that from it we can learn what it means to be true believers, what it means to truly love you and pursue you, Lord, that we can come to your Word and get an understanding of what it means to consider one another in the same way that you sent your Son and he considered us more highly than himself.

So Lord, as we walk through this text tonight, I pray that it would be your words that speak, not I who speaks. I pray that your Holy Spirit would illuminate hearts and minds, would open ears and eyes so we may see the wonderful things that are in your law, that are in your Word. I just ask that you would be with us tonight, that you would go before us. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

At the end of last week's sermon, Brad lobbed me up kind of a softball and said, as he talked about considering one another, the one thing that undergirds, the one thing that sustains, the one thing that anchors us being able to consider one another is love. As we read here in chapter 12, verse 9, it says, "**Let love be genuine.**" So we're going to spend some time there, because what Paul is saying when he says, "**Let love be genuine,**" is there can be an understanding of love that is not genuine, an understanding of love that's not true, an understanding of love that is not right.

I know the last time I preached I talked a little bit about how in our culture *love* has lost its meaning a little bit. I kind of said I say I love pizza. I tell people I love the smell of the grass when it rains. I even let it be known sometimes I love Lamp, but in the end those are all things I use the word *love* for that don't really necessarily define what love is. Right?

Way back in the day, there was a guy named William Shakespeare. You guys might have heard of him, but he wrote a play entitled *The Taming of the Shrew*. In high school, as most of you know, you have to do literature, so I had to read *The Taming of the Shrew*. I tried to read this book, but here's the thing. It was

written in the 1500s, so his English is like, "Doth thou this and that?" I can barely speak the language. I'm not about to try to read this and understand it.

So I decided, "Do you know what? I'm going to do the next best thing. Instead of reading this, I'm going to go find something that will tell me what the story is about." So I did the next best thing. I found this brilliantly made movie entitled *Ten Things I Hate About You*, and everyone between 25 and 40 knows exactly what I'm talking about.

So I went, and I got *Ten Things I Hate About You*. If you haven't seen this movie, don't worry about it. I'm going to let you know what it's about. I got this movie. It's an adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*. I went home, and I started watching it. At the beginning of the movie, we meet Cameron, who is played by Robin from all the Batman movies, if you're familiar with that work. He's in the principal's office because he's new to the school.

He just transferred, and the principal pairs him up with another guy to just show him around the school, let him know where his classes are, where the cafeteria is, all that stuff. So he's walking around the school with this guy. This guy is pointing out, "You don't need to eat with those people. You don't need to talk to those people. Those people are cool, but they probably won't talk to you. You need to do this and do that." They're doing that, and he's just telling him all this information.

They walk out into the quad, and as they enter the quad, Cameron's eyes just lock onto this vision of beauty, this object of his affection all of a sudden whom he has just noticed. All the words his friend is saying just don't mean anything. They evaporate in his ear, and he sees this girl, Bianca. Bianca is walking through the quad doing high school stuff, just talking, and she's walking with her BFF, Chastity. They're having conversation.

The camera moves off of Cameron and his friend who's telling him all this stuff, and it moves square onto Bianca and Chastity. As it moves onto them, we lock onto this profound moment. They're having this amazing conversation. The camera locks on them. You, the viewer, look up and you're listening. Bianca says, "There's a difference between like and love. Because, I like my Skechers, but I love my Prada backpack."

I'm like, "What? That's not how I would define those things." That's just a small glimpse of what our culture has started to use to define *love*. We love all sorts of things. What love is for you and what love is for me are so different. You can ask 20 different people on the street what love is, and you could get 20 different answers.

What has crept into our understanding or misunderstanding of love, because we've started to misdefine love, is idolatry. We've started to put self into how we define love. Don't for a minute think it's this Apple generation with their iPod loving and hipster jeans that have defined *love* this way. This started way back in the garden, because Adam and Eve idolized something over God.

They idolized an idea of freedom. They idolized whatever the Serpent was telling them and forgot the fact that God was love and had created all this for them in perfect harmony. So that's where it all fractured. That's where this self-sufficient idea, self-idolizing idea of love came through. I feel like it has intensified as life has gone on.

We've become more individualistic. We've become a people who think about ourselves more and more. This individualism bleeds into the understanding we have for love. It bleeds into that understanding even for us as believers. Instead of really knowing what God says about love, we start to read our own situations into that. We start to misunderstand what God is saying. Right there is where the problem lies.

A really smart guy named Jonathan Leeman wrote a couple of books on the church, on membership, on church discipline, and he wrote a book entitled *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love*. In this book he puts this idea of idolizing love this way. "We assume not that God is love but that love is God. In other words, we don't go before the real creator of the universe and say to him, 'Please tell us what *you* are like and therefore how *you* define love.' Rather, we begin with our own self-defined concept of love and allow this self-defined concept to play god." That's what we do.

Those self-defined concepts are rampant. They come from the way we were raised, good or bad. They come from the circumstances we've experienced in our lives. They come from the hurts we've had. We use those things, and we start to define what love is instead of looking to God and asking him from his Word what he says love is, what love is supposed to look like, how we're supposed to use that love to consider one another. We start to filter it through ourselves. For love that serves us, that's all about us, we start to play god, because it becomes less about who God is and becomes more about me. I start to elevate myself.

We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. We talked about the difference between covenantal and contractual, because this idolatry of love bleeds into all our relationships whether it's at home, whether it's at work. We start to think of it in a contractual sense, which means, "When I think about love, I have to do these things for you, and if you don't respond in this way, then I can't leave my love with you. I can't love you the same way" or "You have to do all these things for me to love you."

That's not the way the Bible explains love, because we'll see over and over in the New Testament when God talks about love, when he talks about us loving one another, the one distinction that is made about the love in the New Testament is it's always self-sacrificial. It's always sacrificing something for us to show that love correctly. Just in the same way Jesus sacrificed his body and his life so we could be redeemed, that's what the expectation of love for us should look like.

It has happened in my life where I've begun to idolize myself, where I try to play god. I just got married like six months ago. We just celebrated our six-month anniversary. At this point you celebrate every month, so we just celebrated that. The thing is when you get married people give you a lot of advice. You don't have to ask for it. People want to tell you stuff. They're just like, "You're getting married? Let me tell you this."

So people gave me a ton of advice, but the one thing that has remained true, the one thing I saw, was people said, "In marriage you're going to learn how really selfish you are. It's going to come out. You're going to be able to see it when you get married." I was like, "No, we've worked that out already. Right?" It didn't take very long, like less than two weeks. It was easy to see.

The conversation revolved around the bathroom, the toilet to be exact. I went to the bathroom, used it, and all that stuff. My wife came in, and she's like, "Why did you leave the toilet seat up?" In my mind I'm like, *It's as easy for you to put it down as it is for me to lift it up. Why is this an issue? Why are we complaining about this?*

I was like, "Yeah, you can lift it up. I can put it down. Why can't we do this? Why can't you do this for me? I'm obviously going to have to do this for you." That's an easy picture of what it means to be selfish, because those are the little things I don't even think about that I use to elevate myself, to make myself god in my own home, to have my wife do for me the things I think she should do because I feel like I'm entitled to those things.

Idolatrous love is dangerous because of the implications it has on God, on the gospel, and on the truth of his Word. It primarily plays itself out in one distinct way. When we take love and we put it over here and we remove it from authority and truth, basically what we say is, "I can never speak lovingly to you and rebuke you. I can never say anything to you that is against what you believe love it because, inherently, when I say that, when I rebuke you in love, when I speak to you the truth in love, then I am being unloving."

We've seen this. It happens all the time. You say something to a friend and you say they can't do that, or you tell them about a situation and tell them that is unloving for them to do that. It turns on you and is unloving for you to call them out in that way. Here's the thing. Our ability to love, our ability to see whether

something is loving, isn't defined by how we feel. It isn't defined by what I think love is. It's defined by the Bible. We're going to go to the Bible and see what that definition is.

In 1 John, chapter 4, verses 7 and 8, it says this really clearly. There's no confusion. It says, "**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.**" It's not ambiguous. It's not confusing. It's not a statement that requires me to do a lot of work. It says, "**...God is love.**" If you know God, then you know love. If you don't know God, you don't know love. It's a clear line.

We see it in the Word of God. He has defined love for us. That's the definition of love we need to carry into our understanding of how to consider one another, because if we don't have that anchored, if we don't have that understanding of the fact that the love he's talking about, the love that sustains us, the love we're supposed to operate under can only come from God, then we are going to mess it up.

We're always going to read ourselves into the situation. We're always going to be selfish. We're always going to be idolatrous to the way we love, but the Bible clearly states love is from God and it is about God. He has already defined it. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. We don't have to go out there and look to see what it is because it's there plain for all of us to see.

The most beautiful thing about this, which ties into what we've been talking about with *The Dearest Place*, is the fact that God has given us the church as a perfect display of this love. It is embodied in the people who are redeemed and ransomed and called God's own, who operate and thrive in the local church. That's where love is perfectly embodied.

When I say perfectly embodied, I don't mean the church is a perfect institution. I mean God has used the church, uses the church, to show the world what his love is like, because once we grasp what his love is like and operate under that command, under that prescription from the Word of God, then people who are looking in from the outside can see what God's love is like, can see it is self-sacrificial, can see we consider one another and prefer one another over ourselves.

That is completely and utterly different from the way the world loves each other. So the church models true love. The church shows what God's love is like. We have bumps and bruises and scrapes along the way, but those bumps, bruises, and scrapes along the way allow us to fully rely on God because he is the one who defines it. When we have hurts, when we have bumps and bruises against the church, we can go to God and ask him to sustain us with his love.

So we're going to move on in Romans, chapter 12, and Paul teaches us what this genuine love looks like in the context of the church on the ground level of all the stuff we're talking about, because if we didn't already understand genuine love as he opened up in Romans 12:9, then the rest of what we're going to read, the rest of what we're going to learn doesn't make any sense outside of that.

It is anchored by the fact that God is love, so because God is love, we can abhor what is evil. Because God is love, we can be patient in tribulation. Because God is love, we can rejoice in hope. We're about to read that and learn why that is and how love operates and allows us to consider one another. It says here in chapter 12, verse 9, **"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."** Hate evil. With every fiber of your being, you are to hate evil. Be an advocate for what is good and what is right.

Because God is love and God is holy, his holiness means he's separate from sin. He is without sin. He cannot be found anywhere close to sin. He's separate from it. So in his holiness, he separates himself from everything that is sinful, and he has that expectation for his children whom he has saved and ransomed and redeemed and given his love. He expects us to be the same as him in that we are to abhor what is evil. We are to turn away from what is evil and hold fast to what is good.

The question I'm asking really is...*Are there things in our lives, in my life and your life, that we are tolerating that are evil?* Are there things we just look past, things we don't really think about their implications on the gospel and how they diminish God's glory and diminish the gospel? If there are those things, Paul is asking us to lay down those things and uphold what is good, what is right, what is true, what is from God, because when you hold fast what is good, you are holding fast to God's definition of love, because love from God is truly and ultimately good, and he only wants what is good and what is best for his children.

It goes on to say, **"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord."** Really the crux of this verse, the point of this verse, the emphasis of this verse, is the same as what we learned last week in Philippians, chapter 2, verse 3, where it talks about considering one another. It talks about preferring one another. When he says, **"Outdo one another in showing honor,"** he's using the same idea.

In fact, in the original language he uses the same word here in Romans as he uses in Philippians. The idea that is embodied in that is the fact that in outdoing one another in showing honor we are preferring one another. We are considering one another. At the end of the sermon last week during the benediction, Beau gave us a challenge. He asked us to find people in our body we may not really think about all the time to consider, someone we would be able to serve as we go through this week, someone we would be able to prefer over ourselves.

What I want to extend with that mandate is it shouldn't only be happening when we're prompted after a sermon. It should be the way we live our lives. It should be the way our lives are marked, because for us to be a church that embodies the love of God, for us to be a church that is seen as a perfect model of what God's love is like, we are to consider one another in everything we do. It means I consider you as you consider someone else as you consider someone else, and it's a cycle of how we consider one another, because that's what the Bible tells us is true Christianity. That's what the Bible tells us is true belief.

The question is... *What am I doing that's considering my brothers and sisters?* What am I doing that's all about me that I need to put down and start to consider other people and start to prefer them over myself? How can I do things to show love for my brothers and sisters in this body, outside of this body? How can I show I understand the love of God by the way I consider them?

Then we carry on, and it says in verse 12, **"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."** That hope he's telling us to rejoice in is a hope that is never-fading. Our hope is in God, and do you know how assuring that is? Because the nature of that word *hope* means, "I think something and hope it's going to happen, but I don't really know what the outcome is going to be. I don't really know if things are going to work out the way I want them to work out."

As an example, when I leave my house five minutes before a meeting it takes me ten minutes to get to and just hope there's no traffic and angels will just ferry me to my destination or I don't study for a test and I go take it and just hope I'm going to get an A+, it never happened one day in my life. It's like when you walk in the service and you sit in that same row and you just hope that today he notices you and asks you for your number, that hope that you don't really know if that's going to happen. You don't really know if that's going to be the outcome.

The difference between that hope I am describing and the hope Paul is talking about here that we can rejoice in is the hope we can rejoice in is a hope that is never fading, because as we read in Romans, chapter 5, it tells us our hope does not put us to shame. Our hope does not disappoint us, because the hope we have is a hope in God, in God's love that sent his Son to die on the cross for us.

Romans 5:8 tells us, **"...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** God demonstrates his love for us in this. So we have a hope in God because God has already done it. He's not throwing something out there, hoping it comes back the way he wants it to come out. The test is already taken. The results are already in. We hope in God because he has already done it. It's already finished.

When Paul tells us to rejoice in hope, it's because he knows there's an assurance of that hope. You're not thinking something might happen. You already know whom you hope in. Then when he says, "**...be patient in tribulation...**" it's tied to that hope, because tribulation is going to come. Tribulation is suffering that comes to us because of how we believe and love and trust Jesus Christ.

We can only be patient in tribulation when we understand this is not it. This life we lead here, the life we live here is not the only life we have, so we can be patient because we know in the end there is something greater, and that greater thing is bound up in that hope, and that greater thing is God. One day we will be with him forever. We can be constant in prayer because the personhood we pray to is that same God we hope in, the same God we have an assured hope of.

That's why we can be constant in prayer, because we know he knows all the answers. This isn't a surprise for him. Nothing is going to shock him. Nothing is going to come to him that he's like, "I have no idea what's going on." That's why we have a hope in him. That's why Paul, as he writes to the church in Romans, as he writes to the church here in Denton, says, "**Rejoice in hope...**" because our hope is never-fading.

Then he carries on and says, "**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.**"

"**Bless those who persecute you...**" Do you see? Matthew 5 tells us, as Jesus was starting the Sermon on the Mount, he started with the Beatitudes. In Matthew 5, verse 11, it says, "**Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely... Rejoice...for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.**"

What Jesus is saying is before there were prophets in the Old Testament, and when they came and they spoke the Word of God, they were persecuted. Then Jesus came. He lived a perfect, sinless life, one where there should be no argument. There should be nothing bad, but they persecuted him. Then he left, and the apostles were persecuted. The disciples were persecuted.

For us in the same way this has happened and has been a chain from the beginning of time that those who love and trust God, those who believe in God, who understand a love for God, are persecuted for their beliefs, persecuted because of their faith in him, he's telling us that's going to come. It's going to happen. We talked about it a lot when we went through 1 Peter, that persecution is coming, and there's nothing we can do about that. It's coming. We need to gird ourselves and be ready for that.

What is different here is the fact that he says, "Persecution is coming, and you need to bless those who persecute you." When people say things about me, say bad things to me, about me, about my family, I just want to punch them in the face. That's my natural reaction. "Do you know what? You're going to get this." What Paul is telling us here is that reaction is not what's supposed to come out of us. The reaction we're supposed to have when people persecute us, when people say things about us, is to bless them.

We can't do that on our own power. We can't do that in our own mind. The only way we can bless those who persecute us is by understanding we consider others above ourselves, by understanding we prefer others about ourselves, by understanding the love of God compels us to bless those who persecute us, because it's not about us.

Our identity is not bound up in what people say about us. Our identity is not bound up in how they may treat us. Our identity is bound up in the person and work of Jesus Christ, so in those moments when they persecute us, in those moments where they say things about us, our reaction is to bless them. Our reaction is to say, "I have the love of the Lord in me, and that causes me to prefer you and consider you and love you in the way Christ commands me."

Most of you know, or some of you do at least, I grew up in Zimbabwe, which is in Africa for those who don't know geography. It's okay. I forgive you. I grew up there. I lived there until I was 19, before I came here for college. We grew up in the suburbs or the "burbs," whatever you want to call it, and my parents are believers. My dad is a pastor, so we grew up going to church. I accepted Christ at a young age, was in church learning the gospel, understanding what it meant to love one another.

As is the nature of the burbs, you have neighbors all around you, so I grew up on a cul-de-sac. We were like right at the end of the street, and there was a neighbor on our left, a neighbor on our right, a neighbor behind us. When I was about 8 years old, my neighbor on the right became like one of those neighbors you see on TV, and you're just like, "That guy is crazy!" Yeah, it was just insane.

For a period of about a year, periodically, sporadically for about a year, we would wake up in the middle of the night, and someone was throwing stones on our house. I'm not talking like cute, Romeo-and-Juliet, "I'm-here-to-take-you-on-a-date" type stones, like "Wake up." No, I'm talking like rocks with the intent to damage, destroy, and do all manner of evil against your house.

It's a crazy thing to wake up to as an 8-year-old, because I'm like, "Is this what happens when you buy houses? I don't want this." It would happen. He would throw stones for about an hour in the middle of the night, and then it would stop and it wouldn't happen again for like three weeks, four weeks, or a month.

Everyone is like, "I'm never going to Zimbabwe." I'm sorry. It would happen every like three weeks or four weeks. He would wake up, and he would do the same thing.

While this was happening, my parents were like, "We need to engage this guy. We need to talk to him, because this is not normal. Who does this?" So they tried to talk to him, and he's just not having it. He's just like, "No, I'm not talking to y'all." So it happens. It keeps going for about a year. After the year is up, my parents are like, "Do you know what? We need to just go to the cops."

They went to the cops, not to like press charges or anything like that, but they were like, "We just need to bring him to the table and ask him why." *Why* is a good question, right? It's like, "Why are you throwing stones at my house?" They went, talked to the police. The police got them to the table with our neighbor. My parents were there, and a police liaison was there. They just asked him, "Why? What are you doing? What are you thinking?"

His response was an adamant denial of the fact that he was doing this. He was just like, "It's not me. I haven't done that a day in my life," which is ironic because the cops went over to his house, and they saw little piles of rocks next to the wall all piled up neatly ready to fire at any point. So he's like, "I didn't do that." My parents were like, "Really? Okay."

On top of that, after him denying that and saying it wasn't him who did that, he accused my parents. He's like, "I feel like you guys are casting a 'witchcrafty' spell on my house, and so because of that stones are flying from my house to your house, stones I am not throwing, but you deserve to be stoned because of that." My parents were like, "What? This doesn't make any sense."

So they left that meeting. He went on his way. They went on their way. We sold the house, moved to a new house, different neighborhood. Eight years later, this neighbor tracks down my parents, figures out where we live, and he comes over. I'm 16 at this point, and I'm like, "I'm ready. Let's go. Let's do this thing. What you got?"

He shows up, he walks in the house, and he came so he could ask for forgiveness from my parents. He came so he could repent and let them know it was him the entire time who had been throwing rocks. He came with money so he could pay for all the damages he had done to the house. It took eight years for him to get to that point, but he found them and wanted to tell them that.

Why do I say this? Let's read the end of Romans 12. It says here, **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'** To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry,

feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Live peaceably with all, repaying no one evil for evil. **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."** Do you see? You can always fight crazy with crazy. My parents could've woken me and my 5-year-old brother up and been like, "Man the battle stations. Let's go. It's on," but that wasn't their reaction. That's not what happened when these stones were being thrown to their house, which they within their own rights could've done.

The only reason that wasn't the reaction was because they understood what the love of God was. They understood in loving God and laying down your life and considering others and preferring others, you learn to live peaceably with your neighbors. When your neighbor goes a little crazy and starts to throw rocks at your house or when a family member starts to say weird things about you or when you're at work and you're just getting persecuted, this is what this verse is written for.

It's not written for those easy times where things are happy-go-lucky and we're all happy and nothing is happening. It's written for those tough times where things are happening against you and you feel like you need to bust out of that. What Paul is saying is, "We rejoice in hope. We are patient in tribulation. We live peaceably with those we can live peaceably with, because that's what the love of God compels us to do. That's what happens when we understand what it means when it says God is love."

I use that example because that's the best example in my life so far I've seen for living peaceably with all. That's the best example I've seen for not taking vengeance upon yourself but allowing the Lord to work through the heart and the mind of whatever evil is coming against you, whoever is portraying that evil on you. I watched my parents got through that. I actually called up my mom this week to make sure I didn't lie about the story.

I watched them do that because I saw them do that and knew they were doing that, not because they just wanted to be better people, not because they were just better people than other people, but because they really understood what God meant when he said, "Consider one another. Prefer one another," when God said, "Leave it to me. The wrath belongs to me."

In those moments when that's happening to you, are you going to consider someone else more important than you consider yourself? Are you going to be able to fight the crazy with not repaying evil for evil, being able to bless those who persecute you, those who throw stones at you, not being vindictive and doing the same thing to them that causes them to go, "Well, he's doing what I'm doing to him, then there's nothing awesome about his God. Why would I want to follow this God who is vindictive and reactionary?"

The Bible will tell us that's not the attitude we are to have as Christians. That is not how we consider one another. That is not how we overcome evil. We overcome evil with good, not because we're just better people, but because God has given us a love that comes from him that is sustained by him, that is all about him, that brings him glory and brings people to know him and love him more.

When it talks about burning coals here, heaping burning coals on someone's head, it's talking about God's judgment. It's not that judgment that causes... The hope of that judgment isn't that that person burns in the lake of fire for eternity, but the hope of that judgment is that they would be remorseful and repentant, that they would see how you react to them, see how you showed them love and blessed them, and understand there's something different about you, there's something different about your understanding of how the world functions and how the world works.

So our neighbor knew my parents were Christians. He had worked with my dad for about two years, but he knew they were Christians when he was throwing stones on their house. He knew they were Christians when they were trying to bring him to the table. He knew they were Christians when they were trying to greet him in the middle of the street and he just wasn't having it. The whole point of us heaping coals isn't so we celebrate when someone is avenged or vengeance happens upon them.

The whole point is we hope they see the love of Christ in us, the love of God in us, that would compel them to be remorseful and repentant and come and see and love the Lord. I don't know if our neighbor ended up being Christian. I don't know if he ended up loving and trusting God, but all I know is he saw what God's love was like in that situation. He saw what God's love was like when he was forgiven for a past sin. He saw what God's love was like when he didn't have to pay for the damages he caused, because he saw that in how my parents understood what God was saying in his Word.

I've asked a lot of questions, and I have a couple of more to ask as we close out. The question is... *Whose idea of love have you embraced?* Whose idea of love do you live out? Whose idea of love is your life governed by? Because we've seen if it's governed by a self-righteous, self-idolizing, self-defined concept of love, then it's not the same love that comes from God, that is about God.

We've seen if you have a genuine love for God, if you understand what it means to love God and he gives you that understanding and that knowledge, then you can abhor what is evil. You can hold fast to what is good. You can rejoice in hope. You can be patient in tribulation. You can bless those who persecute you. You can live peaceably with your neighbors. You don't have to repay evil for evil. You don't have to be overcome by evil.

When you understand God's love, when you are governed by that love, when that is the kind of love you walk in day to day, then you can walk out in these things and be able to consider one another more than you consider yourself. That's what the Bible calls us to. That's why we have the church, because we sharpen one another. As iron sharpens iron, we can walk together and learn how to consider one another in this context.

That's why it's such a beautiful picture of God's love for us, because we're all in here striving to love God in the way he calls us to love him. That's what gives us power as true believers, true Christians. It allows us to forgo ourselves, to forget about ourselves and elevate others, to think about others more highly and count them more significant than ourselves. So we want to embrace that love. We want to embrace the genuine love of God, because without that we're not living the life of a true believer. We're not living the life Jesus laid down his life to give us.

That's my hope for us as a church that we would really understand what it means when it says in the Word that true love has nothing better than this, that one would lay down their life for their brothers. Just like Jesus laid down his life for us and considered himself less significant than us and came to die on the cross, that is how we are to live our lives. That is how we are to show love to one another and consider one another. Let's pray.

God, you are good. We love you, for you are good. It is because you first loved us that we can even come before you, that we can even call you Father. We thank you for sending your Son, your only begotten Son. John 3:16 tells us, "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**" We marvel in that. We marvel in that gift, your grace that affords us eternal life, your grace that brings us into relationship with you, Lord. We just ask, Lord, that you would give us an understanding of this true love, Lord.

We know it's not cognitive. We know it's not just us reading and being able to put it to work, but Lord, we know it is your Spirit working through your Word that allows us to understand this and live it out. So we ask that as we go this week, your Spirit will be with us, Lord, that you would anchor these words deep in our hearts, that we would strive to love one another with brotherly affection, because that love comes from you. So we thank you for tonight. We thank you for being here with us. We just ask that you would be with us as we go. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.