

Sunday, February 8, 2026 - Intentional Love – Pastor John Henry Raskin

God's love is intentional, personal, and transformative. Our calling is to love others with the same deliberate love He shows us.

1. God Loved Us First

- God's love is not reactive or accidental—it is purposeful (1 John 4:19).
- Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8).
- God's love is rooted in His character, not our behavior.

2. What God's Love Does in Us

- Through faith, we become new creations filled with God's Spirit and purpose (John 3:16).
- His love makes us His children and equips us to love others uniquely.

3. Our Call: Love Intentionally

Jesus commands us to love others as He loved us (John 13:34). Intentional love requires habits such as:

- **Presence:** giving full attention.
- **Appreciation:** seeing the good in others.
- **Forgiveness:** releasing grudges.
- **Sacrifice:** serving even when inconvenient.
- **Truth in kindness:** speaking with grace.

4. Loving Like Jesus

We cannot love intentionally by our own strength—only by abiding in Christ (John 15:4). His love fills and sustains us so we can pour it out onto others.

5. Action Step for This Week

Identify ONE person who is difficult to love or overlooked. Do ONE intentional act that costs you time, pride, or resources to show them value.

6. Romantic Intentionality (Valentine's Focus)

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 shows love as patient, kind, humble, truthful, enduring. Godly romantic love is a covenant of intentional support, sacrifice, trust, and Christ-centered commitment.

Encouragement

Pray before spending time with others: ask God to make you a blessing, to forgive selfishness, and to help you love with Christlike grace.

INTENTIONAL LOVE

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week we traversed the subject of wisdom.

Specifically, how Lady Wisdom as described in the Book of proverbs is revealed in the New Testament as the Spirit of Christ and is the only true and reliable source of wisdom.

We concluded that being intentional about seeking God's wisdom through His Spirit to navigate life's crossroads is the key to experiencing the Abundant Life that a relationship with God in Christ offers.

Today we're going to talk some more about intentionality and how we can intentionally experience the love of God by intentionally choosing to love other people.

Since this coming week is the greeting card, flowers and candy industry's celebratory pseudo holiday known as Valentine's Day, ...when many people, believers and unbelievers alike, pursue potential mates,

and husbands and wives hopefully celebrate each other; we will touch on how to be intentionally Godly in romantic love as well.

But let's begin by looking at the intentional love that God has for us.

1 John 4:19

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Most of us have experienced "leftover" love—being invited to a party only because someone else cancelled or receiving a gift that was clearly a re-gift...

Maybe you have felt the pain associated with someone using you "on the rebound" from a fractured relationship, only to be left behind when someone new comes along.

Being an afterthought never makes you feel good. Quite the opposite, it makes you feel less than, even UN-loved.

But I encourage you beloved, God's love for you was never plan B.

The Apostle Paul tells us...

Romans 5:8

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Intentional love is most viable, most REAL when the object of that love is least "lovable."

Paul uses the phrase "While we were still sinners."

While we were indifferent, He was invested.

While we were running away, He was running toward us.

Last year we talked in depth about the love of the father chasing after the prodigal son and how His love was more extravagant in His pursuit than the extravagant wastefulness of His son could ever be.

That is God's love towards us.

Love—real love—is never accidental.

It is a choice. It is deliberate. It is intentional.

To be intentional means to act with purpose and design.

Before the first star was hung in the sky, God had you on His mind.

You didn't surprise God into loving you.

You didn't impress God into loving you.

You didn't negotiate God into loving you.

God does not love you because He has to.

God does not love you because you are useful to Him.

God does not love you because you've earned it.

God loves you because He decided to love you.

Before you were born, before you sinned, before you said yes to Him, before you prayed your first prayer, before you lifted your hands in worship—

God set His love on you intentionally as His prized possession.

Consider a master restorer who buys a ruined painting.

He doesn't buy it because it is beautiful; he buys it because he intends to make it beautiful.

His investment is the proof of the painting's value.

God's love is rooted in His character, not your behavior.

On the off chance that there is someone here today who has not yet made the decision to make Jesus the Lord of their life I will read this scripture to prove that God loves you even if you have not yet made the decision that you love Him.

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

This scripture is a love note to the human race and is written specifically to those who have not already chosen Christ as Lord.

It's not about certain "someones" who have been pre-determined and set aside for eternity with God.

It refers to any human being who intentionally chooses Jesus at any point in their life to be their Lord and Savior.

If you haven't made that decision yet, today may be the day, but regardless, know that God made you in His image and that God loves you.

Love is not something God does; it is simply who He is.

John the Beloved tells us "God is love."

God's love is not a reaction to your performance, nor is it a generic sentiment broadcast to the masses.

God's love is personal.

God's love is not random. It is intentional, purposeful, and unstoppable.

God's love is a calculated, specific, and relentless pursuit of every human being that He made in His own image.

God created you with His purpose in mind. You have a unique personality, body type, passions, talents, abilities, giftings, and life experiences.

You have personal ways that you naturally express love. You have a love language.

When you believe the truth of John 3:16 and commit your heart and life to God, He creates something new.

You become a new creation, and you will never be the same again.

His Spirit penetrates your heart and ignites life and love within your human body and soul.

You become His born-again child. He has work prepared for you to do and it is the work of love.

There will never be anyone else like you. No one can be, do, and love like you!

You've been deposited in this world, at this time, in this place as an expression of God's creativity AND His love!

Now, for those of us who follow Jesus and who desire to be intentional about how we love God, hear this...

The love we receive from the Father is not meant to be hoarded; it's meant to be channeled, and actively modeled.

It is meant to be given freely to others.

Loving intentionally is a proactive, sacrificial, and daily choice to put others first, rooted in God's unconditional love for you rather than your feelings about them.

Intentional love requires shifting from a self-centered, passive approach to love, to an active one that prioritizes serving others, practicing consistent forgiveness, and fostering genuine connection, as exemplified by Christ.

John 13:34

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

When Jesus gave this "New Commandment", He set the bar at an intentional level:

"As I have loved you, so you must intentionally love one another."

To love intentionally, we need to build these specific habits:

1. The Habit of Presence:

In a world of digital distractions, being "all there" is a radical act of love.

Have you ever noticed someone scrolling on their smart phone while the person across the table stares blankly out the window waiting for them to put it down?

Putting the phone down requires spiritual discipline that the Holy Spirit will provide when we provide the intention to pay attention to each other.

2. The Habit of Appreciation:

Intentional love looks for what is right in a person rather than what is wrong.

We often perceive other people and especially our loved ones through the lens of their differences with our preferences.

Intentional love flips the lens and allows us to appreciate them as they are not as we wish they were.

3. The Habit of Forgiveness:

Unintentional people hold grudges by default. Intentional people release them by design.

4. The Habit of Self-Sacrifice:

Showing up for a brother or sister in need when it disrupts your schedule is how we wash each other's feet like Jesus.

5. The Habit of Speaking Truth in Kindness:

Loving someone enough to tell them the scriptural truth when they are going off the path but doing it with the grace that Christ showed you.

As believers, we are called to be "Love Professionals."

We don't just love those who are easy to love; we intentionally seek out the marginalized and the difficult, mirroring the grace we've received.

These habits require intentionality; they also require diligence and practice.

As with anything that you're trying to get good at practice makes perfect.

If all of this seems a bit much for you remember that you're not doing it by yourself.

When you decide to be intentional about loving others as God loved you in Christ you will be doing it in tandem with Jesus through His Holy Spirit.

In order to effectively love others the way God calls us to love, we must be plugged into the Source.

Jesus tells us to abide in Him and remain in Him.

John 15:4

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

The fruit that Jesus references here is love.

We must be closely attached to the One who loves us with perfect love, so that we may be able to pour out His love to others.

We cannot love intentionally on our own strength. Our "love tanks" are too small and leak too easily.

If you aren't actively submitted to His Spirit, receiving the intentional, relentless love of God, you will eventually resent the people you are trying to love.

Remember, you don't need to love other people to be loved by God.

You should love other people because you are loved by God.

If you want the power to love others the way Christ loves you all you need to do is to ask Him for that power.

Remember that Jesus is our blueprint for intentional, sacrificial love.

Jesus didn't just "happen" to die for us. He came to die for us.

He set His face toward Jerusalem when His time had come. That is the ultimate definition of intentionality.

Now before we get to the Valentine's Day romantic section of this message here is an action plan for how to love other people, be they family, friends or strangers with God's love.

Don't let your takeaway from this message be to try to "love better" in a general sense.

Generalities are where good intentions go to die.

Identify one person in your life today who is difficult to love or whom you have been neglecting.

Commit to one intentional act this week that will cost you something (time, pride, or money) to show them they are valued.

'Nuff said.

Now to the Valentine's Day section of today's program...

...no Valentine's Day message in church would be complete without a shout out to Paul's Letter to the Church at Corinth.

These words are a template for romantic success whether you are dating someone, considering marrying someone or in a covenant partnership with a long-term spouse.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Finally, we see intentionality reach a beautiful crescendo in Paul's letter about love.

When you read this scripture remember that God IS love.

When a man and a woman enter into a God-centered relationship, they are called to model the covenantal love of Christ and the Church.

Godly romantic love is more than "chemistry", it is a covenant of intentionality:

To all men of God, this is a model of Sacrificial Leadership & Support:

It calls us to the Agape love of the cross. It challenges us to ask our partner, "How can I serve your growth more than my own comfort?"

"How can I lay my life down for you?"

To all women of God, this is a model of safe surrender, knowing that you can trust your partner to love and cherish you as Jesus loves us all.

To both men and women of God we see that because God sacrificed His rights as King of Glory for us, we never need to "Lord it over" each other or try to control each other.

We only need to intentionally support and nurture each other to have a Godly relationship.

You remember the old pop song "Feelings"?

Feelings fluctuate like the weather, but intentional love is the bedrock on which a relationship will flourish.

It is the decision to stay, to build, and to cherish even when the "spark" feels dim.

An intentional loving relationship isn't two people looking to each other to fill their own needs; it's two people looking toward God, to give them each the strength to be a support and comfort to the other.

When romantic love is intentional, it creates a sanctuary, a space where two people can be fully known and fully loved, because their commitment is anchored in the unchanging character of God rather than the shifting sands of emotion.

Here is a takeaway for all of our relationships this week...

Consider what distractions in your life keep you from having deep relationships that foster Godly change and growth.

Be honest with yourself about the ways that you are self-serving in your relationships.

And then in a heartfelt effort to love more intentionally, make time to pray whenever you are about to spend time with someone God loves.

Perhaps your prayer might be something like this...

“Lord, You are Holy and You are love. Make me a blessing to this person.

Forgive me of my selfishness and help me to love them in the sacrificial ways that You have loved me.

May I always speak truth and grace into the lives of those around me.

And may my actions reflect Your Word at all times.

Amen.”