



#12 In the Romans Series

Living Love

Forest Park Church

August 31st, 2025

Intro - A Man & His Courageous Dog

A man and his faithful companion of a dog were out on a walk one sunny day in a wooded area on a black top road.

One would assume their plan was for a peaceful time filled with exercise and fresh air, just enjoying the outdoors, a man and his best friend.. when things took a scary, and potentially deadly turn.

As they walked along the road, completely unaware, about 100 feet out in front of them, a massive bear emerged out of the forest, slowly walking in their direction.

He was a big guy, and steadily headed towards them without either one of them catching eye of him.

Finally, the dog noticed the bear first, and then his owner; who, as we would expect, responded by starting to take a few startled steps backwards, and began debating what to do in his mind, not wanting to run away too quickly for fear of the bear beginning to chase them.

He starting stepping backwards at about the same pace that the bear was coming towards them, slowly and anxiously trying to move away from the dangerous situation.

The dog, noticing the bear first, assessed the situation quickly and turned to look as his owners position.

Suddenly, in an act of great bravery and courage, the dog stepped in front of his owner and began to position himself against the bear, barking to trying to deter him away.

The dog stood his ground and worked at the bear as the bear grew closer and closer, even beginning to speed up.

Out of an effort to win the dogs position, the bear started to run at them, but the dog wouldn't move. Relentless, fearless, courageous... the dog stood his ground.

When the bear ran out of room to run he came to a sudden halt, right in front of the dog, almost out of pure shock that the dog was unwilling to give up his ground, the bear took a step back.

The dog leaned into this new found dominance and began barking even more fiercely, as the bear retreated his position and backed off from his attack.

The Love of A Dog

It's been documented time and time again, true stories where dogs have been known to show an enormous amount of relentless unconditional love towards their owners.

They've been said to have some of the greatest loyalty and bravery in love that our world has ever seen.

- Stories of young people protected by courageous pets that fought off another animals vicious attack.
- Stories of families saved from house fires because of a dog's quick action to alert them.
- Stories of lost children being found with a dog by their side, watching out for them.
- Stories of service dogs who faithfully tended to their owners needs and disabilities, without a hint of complaint or hesitation.

And today, I bring them to attention, because we can learn the lessons from these selfless creatures.

We pick back up in a series through the book of Romans, in the middle of chapter 12, and a conversation Paul is having about being living sacrifices, having humility, and being a part of a greater body.

Coming out of last week, we see that each of us our gifted by God to help the greater whole.

No one is complete in themselves, but that we all serve a purpose in the body to build it up and do our part that God has assigned to us.

Making It Practical

Paul knows that, if left here and not further examined, we might struggled to take this metaphor of a body with many members, and make it practical with real things that we can do to move into this life of gifted living.

And that's where we pick up today.

Into a practical look at what we need in order to live out this 'living sacrifice' kind of life style, and learn to make it a part of our daily walk.

1. Genuine Love Leads The Way

Romans 12:9-10

Marks of the True Christian

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

10 Love one another with brotherly affection.

No dog throws his body in front of a bear for his owner, unless his love for that owner is genuine.

And for us the same is true.

Unless love is genuine, we would not dare to protect in such a sacrificial way that might cause harm to ourselves.

But Dogs Don't Know Better.

But you might... 'well dogs are instinctual and don't know any better'.

And to that I'd say, you'd be right.

And there lies our own struggle with the bigger issue.

We do know better.

- *We know that standing up for someone who is weak might mean we are targeted.*
- *We know that protecting someone in a harsh situation might get a hurt.*
- *We know that other brothers and sisters in Christ haven't been perfect, and we might know specifics.*
- *We feel that in certain cases, another person does not deserve our love, and does not necessarily deserve to be protected.*
- *We know that sometimes people are in a certain situation because of sin.*
- *We know that we don't like the way another brother or sister has treated us, and we find it hard to treat them any different than what they've done.*

But the dog??

- He doesn't know, nor does he care.
- He doesn't think about all the wrong things his owner has done.
- He doesn't ponder the mistakes and sin that got him into the bad situations he now finds himself.
- He doesn't hold grudges of past mistakes his owner has collected.. times where he was disciplined and didn't deserve it, or wrongly treated when he was misunderstood and trying to do good.

- The dog lets all things pass out of his mind, and does the genuinely loving and loyal thing he should do, right now in this moment.

We can learn from this mindless and relentless love.

But we will not, unless we learn to put away the following types of love that hinder us from genuine love and brotherly affection.

A. Conditional Love

Defined as: *Love that is given only if certain conditions are met.*

These conditions are often about the person being loved meeting specific expectations or behaving in certain ways.

Example:

"I will love you as long as you're not in this mess because of sin."

"I love you because you're not annoying, insecure, ungrateful, etc."

Key feature: This love is based on criteria, like personality traits, behaviors, or achievements.

When we love like this, the love starts with a certain set of pre-determined guidelines.

It starts within us, with a certain level of comfort that we have defined.

We set the guidelines and the criteria, and we see who falls into those categories. These are the people we can now love.

Of course, this sounds wrong to us. But we find ourselves struggling to not see and make judgment based on the other persons life, whether or not we are willing to be involved and love them.

B. Contingent Love

Defined as: *Love that depends on external factors or circumstances, often more situational or context-driven.*

Example:

"I love you because we're in the same church/community."

"I love you as long as you make me feel a certain way."

"I love you because we are in this phase of life together."

"I love you while this other group of people are not present, and it's not as embarrassing to love you."

Key feature: This love is dependent on external situations or events, not just internal traits or choices.

The last one in the list above may sound ridiculous to you.

But don't shy away from it too quickly. The Apostle Paul says he opposed Peter to his face for this very thing.

Galatians 2:11-13

Paul Confronts Peter

11 But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. **12** When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. **13** As a result, other Jewish believers followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

C. Convenient Love

Defined as: *Love that is maintained primarily because it is easy, comfortable, or low-effort — not necessarily because of deep emotional connection, commitment, or enduring values.*

Example:

"I love you because it's easier than being alone."

"We've been together so long, it would be too hard to start over."

"I stay with you because everything is already set up — finances, routine, etc."

Key feature: This love is tied to comfort, ease, or lack of challenge, rather than deep or tested commitment.

Think of 3 People You Love.

We talked about this becoming a practical this morning, so try this.

Choose 3 people right now that you would say you have an agape style love for, that are not a part of your family or close relation.

Think about your interaction with those 3 people, and the places and ways that you connect with each of them.

Is it over ball games, concerts, get togethers on a weekly basis to do something fun, church gatherings, lunch at work, etc.

What's the common ground for that relationship.

Now do this:

Ask yourself whether or not the ways that you connect with them are all things you like and want to be doing.

Are those life avenues, places, and circumstances convenient for you?

If you find that they are convenient for you, that's not such a bad thing right away.

If you connect with people other likeminded type of things, that's good, it's a positive thing that you are finding mid-ground with others and you have close friendships and relationships.

It's especially rewarding when you have a small circle of people that you can confide in and share life this way.

But in a church body setting, not every relationship will share this common ground.

As a matter of fact church, most will not.

If you love in a way that is convenient for you, you will only love those that fall into your convenience, and will miss the ones that do not.

But worse...

As soon as someone falls outside of that convenience, you will stop showing the level of attention it takes to love.

And is that even love?

The Problem

The problem in all 3 of our short coming versions of genuine love is that they start with us, and move to the outside world.

Jesus is calling us to be transformed, living sacrifices; that if anything starts with us, it's the inward transformation of the inner person that is no longer controlled by outward circumstances

We are living sacrifices, with humility, learning to use gifts given by God to us for the common good of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, ready to genuinely love from a pure heart, not a conditional, contingent, convenient preference that keeps us looking like the rest of the world.

John 13:34-35

34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. **35** Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

How did Jesus love us & those entrusted to Him?

1. He Revealed God To Them.

John 17:6-8

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

6 "I have revealed you^[a] to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. **7** Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. **8** For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

Jesus reveals His first purpose with those God had given Him, and makes it very clear for us.

His duty was to reveal God to them.

Not to spend all of His time dedicated to teaching them worldly skills, fun hobbies, things He enjoyed, or even things He might think they would enjoy.

Now can there be a benefit to any of those in building relationships and opening the door to others for a deeper connection?

Yes absolutely!

We often connect with people through things that are of this life.

But Jesus had a mission, and it was to reveal God to them.

2. He Prayed For Them.

John 17:9-11

9 *I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of ^[a] your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.*

Jesus prayed for those that God gave to Him. His realization in this prayer is profound as we remember that He Himself was in human form.

All of us, in human form, are in many ways powerless to the outward circumstances of this life.

Jesus knew that He would be leaving, and of course, He was powerful.

But He had submitted Himself to human form and knew that He would be leaving his companions on this earth.

So, He prayed to the Father, knowing that God holds the world in His hands and could keep them in His own departure.

We are limited and weak.

We cannot so much as change the outcome of easiest circumstance in another persons life without the opportunity and God giving us a place to do so.

And then, our efforts are left to external factors such as encouragement, wise guidance, love, setting an example, respect, life coaching, and council.

Things that ultimately still allow the other party to choose their way.

Jesus also recognized this free will in his disciples, and the limitation set, keeping Him from controlling their own outcomes without their consent. \

So He prayed for them.

3. He Protected Them.

John 17:12

12 *While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by^[a] that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*

You might wonder, okay, he protected them, but in what way?

Because ultimately He was killed and many of His closest followers would be mistreated and even killed as well for the sake of the gospel.

By Teaching To Walk In The Light

Often times Jesus's disciples would have questions.

As he taught, lived, helped, guided, and worked to reveal truth, they were stumped more than once at how the truth would relate to what they actually did in the world.

Jesus taught them this very thing.

He protected them from going in a direction that would be against truth.

He kept them walking towards the light.

We can see how he did this on one occasion recorded in the book of John.

Jesus was about to go back to Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead, a very important moment in His life and ministry.

But the disciples were nervous about going to Judea and were against this practical move to head to Lazarus' house.

Why were they afraid?

1. Religious Leaders Wanted to Kill Jesus

- Just before the Lazarus story (John 10), Jesus had been in Jerusalem (in Judea) and had claimed unity with the Father.
- The Jewish leaders saw this as blasphemy and tried to stone Him and arrest Him (John 10:31, 39).

2. Judea Was Full of Tension

- Under Roman occupation, there was constant friction between:
 - Roman authorities
 - Jewish religious leaders
 - Revolutionary movements
- Anyone drawing big crowds or stirring controversy (like Jesus) was seen as a political and religious threat.

3. Disciples' Fear Was Realistic

- Going back to Judea meant risking arrest or death—for Jesus and His followers.

And we know this to be true by the way His disciples responded to his relentless effort to go back.

John 11:7-10

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

14-16

14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 So Thomas, called the Twin,[a] said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Who are you...

- *Revealing God to.*
- *Praying for.*
- *Protecting.*

The church is designed to be a group of people that are all upholding that same inward circle mission of Jesus. To reveal God, pray for each other, and protect each other in truth.

2. Genuine Love Opens The Door.

The Pre-requisite

In a college setting, every student knows that there are classes that must be accomplished before other classes can be taken.

We call this a pre-requisite.

Ask any of our college students right now, (as I was just recently talking with one about the troubles of scheduling classes) and you will find that the main priority is to take the classes in good timing.

If they don't get in a certain class this semester, they will not be able to take that next class next semester to complete the requirements for their degree.

When love is genuine, the door is open for the list that follows as Paul continues in Romans 12.

If love is not genuine, we haven't completed the pre-requisite that holds us back from being able to do what's mentioned shortly after.

"...Outdo one another in showing honor."

Romans 12:10-13

*...Outdo one another in showing honor. **11** Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit,^[a] serve the Lord. **12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. **13** Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

Love opens the door for us to fulfill the work of the gospel and use our gifts for the common good of those around us.

Has you done this?

Have you loved in such a way that you are willing to change the way you live your everyday life to win more over, to meet the needs of the saints, to show hospitality, to open the door of the church family to someone else?

Closing - Laying It All Down.

The mom of an 8-month old baby, stepped outside of her home for a few moments to go to her car, and left her baby upstairs Inside their home.

Upon her return, she realized the house had caught on fire and was quickly beginning to get out of control.

She tried to get in and head upstairs to where she knew her young infant was and she had recently been, but she couldn't.

The smoke was too thick for her to get through.

She tried, and tried again, as any mom would, doing anything she could to get upstairs where maybe the fire hadn't become has severe yet, but she just couldn't get past it, coming back with burns to her hands and face.

She was becoming helpless, and then, the door, overcome by the fire, became unusable, and she couldn't get back in.

All hope seemed lost.

When firefighters arrived to the scene, with gear, they were able to get to where the 8 month old was located In the house, and what they found that day revealed an extraordinary act of selfless sacrifice.

The family's dog, Polo, had covered the young baby with his body to protect her from the fire, and to much surprise, the baby survived.

Polo wasn't as fortunate as the family's 8 month old.

He lost his life shielding her, and she lived on because of his heroic act.

That's what we have today church.

We have a savior, who lost His life to protect us and save ours.

And He has called us to the same love that lead Him to such an amazing act of generosity.

That lead Him to death, even death on a cross.

John 15:12-13

12 *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

Who are you laying your life down for?

Is it your kids? Is it your family? Is it after the pattern of this world, or is it after Christ, who laid His life down while we were still sinners?

Each of these are honorable, and well deserving of praise. The latter is the greatest.