



## **Summer Fruit-Part 1**

### **Fruit of the Spirit: Love**

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, when the protesters occupied downtown Seattle, they learned a lesson in growing their own food. Did you notice that? They had their little community gardens there and they realized that growing your own food is hard. A few pieces of cardboard and tarp and topsoil is not going to be as easy to produce your own food as you might think. Matter of fact, I think they're still waiting for their first slice of summer watermelon. It's just not on the way. Matter of fact, they resorted to begging for snacks and Gatorade from the surrounding tax-paying Seattleians. But the point of all that is that in this world, it's going to be tough to grow your own food. If you've tried to grow some food in your own backyard, you know that. Right? It's not easy. You may have successfully put a few things on your salad from your yard, but it's really hard to grow and sustain a grocery list of things in your backyard because it's going to take a lot of work. It's easy to grow weeds, right? We see those between the cracks in the asphalt on the drive over to church this morning. But when it comes to growing food, you're going to have to work because it's a post-Genesis 3 world that we live in. And the Bible said that's the way it's going to be. To grow fruit, good fruit, it's going to be hard.

That analogy, of course, is one that's used throughout the Scripture, not just in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament as well regarding what God expects of his people. He sees his people, according to Isaiah Chapter 5, as a garden. And he says, "You know, I've tilled it. I've given it all the attention. I put a wall around it, I protected it. And what I expect my people to do is to produce good fruit." If you know anything about the first five chapters of Isaiah, you know they weren't doing very well. The report card was that they weren't growing good fruit. It looked a lot like the community gardens there in the Chaz-Chop zone. It was pretty much a failure at that point and God was going to bring judgment on his people because he gave them everything they needed to bear good fruit and they didn't do it. God looks down at us and this is what we know and what we're responsible for here. But God has put a wall around us. He's cultivated and tilled and given us all that we need and he looks down at us in South Orange County and says, "Here is my garden. I expect to see some good fruit here."

That's an important perspective to think of ourselves as an investment of God and that God is attempting through the work of his Spirit to do something good and produce good fruit through us. We've got to know what that is. We've got to define what it is. We've got to think carefully through what God expects, because this is what we must do as human beings. Made in his image with a purpose on this planet to do what God has asked us to do. To do that is essential. He's got some things, as Pastor John said, is we're going to spend the next nine weeks looking through Galatians Chapter 5, he's got a very specific list of things that he wants to produce. If he likes peanuts, then we should produce some peanuts. If it's cantaloupe, let's get the cantaloupe going. What is it that he wants to see produced in his people?

So I want you to turn to Galatians Chapter 5, and I want you to know that today as we just tackle the first one, which is really the biggest one, and we're going to see the implications of this first

thing that is itemized as the fruit of the Spirit. We're going to need to see how that just really is cascading into all the rest. But the first one should be no question. If you're going to make a list of virtues in the New Testament that God wants to see among his people, I hope that you would guess, even without going or graduating from Sunday school, that he needs to see his people loving each other. He wants to see love. It's the greatest of these. Remember that passage in First Corinthians 13, verse 13, "faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love." That's the thing that he wants, he wants to see that. And we've got to define it the way he defines it, not the way the world defines it. So we need to spend some time thinking about what is this fruit that he wants to produce among us.

It's not going to be easy as our passage makes clear. So I want to read the whole context and then we're going to zero in on verses 22 and 23, believe it or not, for the next nine weeks, Lord willing. We don't know what tomorrow holds, but that's our hope. But I want you to see the whole of where Paul puts this to the Galatian churches. There's a lot of conflict in the Galatian churches and what they really need to see in their relationships with each other is more love. That's going to top the list.

But let's look at the conflict. He says in verse 16, this is Galatians Chapter 5. Grab your Bibles if you haven't already and turn to this. I want you to see this with your own eyes, verse 16 and we'll read down through verse 26, the end of the chapter. Paul says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit," live a life that is in accordance with this third person of the Godhead who was dispatched the day that you repented and put your trust in Christ. If in fact you are a real Christian, this is the person of Godhead who is said to be influencing you. It's said to be convicting you and prompting you and guiding you. Those are the kinds of things the Spirit wants to do in your life. But you've got to choose to walk by that. You have to choose to walk in step with that, and in sync with that Spirit. And if you do, "you won't gratify," it says in the middle of verse 16, "the desires of the flesh." And that's the problem in a fallen world. We've got a humanity. We've got a principle of our own humanity that wants to grow weeds and God wants to bear good fruit. "The desires of the flesh," the things that I naturally want, my propensities as a human being "are against the Spirit. The desires of the Spirit, the propensities of the Spirit are against the flesh." "For these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do," that we wouldn't need to spend nine weeks on the fruit of the Spirit if it were easy. We wouldn't have to have all this development and cultivation and thoughtfulness about what is the fruit God wants if it were easy. But there's a conflict. There's a conflict in your heart, there's a conflict in my heart, and this is the problem we're going to have.

Verse 18 says, "But if you're led by the Spirit," if you'd follow his lead, if you would do what he asks, if you'd cooperate and keep in step with the Spirit, well, then "you're not going to be under the law." You're going to have this sense of guidance. He's going to direct you in the law that the Spirit wrote. You're going to be walking in step with that. Verse 19. "Now the works of the flesh, they're evident." The weeds are easy to produce. "Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these," saying he could go on and on. "I warn you, as I've warned you before, that those who do such things," they practice these things, their lives are



characterized by this kind of crop. No, they're not going to inherit the kingdom of God. They're not Christians.

"But," in contrast, verse 22, "the fruit of the Spirit." If you follow the Spirit, you walk by the Spirit, you let his promptings and his guidings win this battle in your life as you choose to do what he wants, you overcome the desires of your flesh. You'll see these kinds of things. You'll see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Of course not. The law doesn't have to tell us not to do those things. Those are the things the Spirit is trying to produce.

Verse 24. "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh." That's a mental thing that we do that we say we're not going to fulfill the desires of my humanity, the things that are fallen, producing the weeds, the bad crop. I've crucified that. I've said, no, I don't want to do that "with its passions and desires." I'm declaring war against that. "If we live by the Spirit," if we have life by the Spirit, if we are forgiven because the Spirit of God dwells in us and Christ's payment on the cross is applicable to us, well, then you ought to then, in your everyday life, "keep in step with the Spirit." He's guiding, he's directing, he's saying come this way, produce these things. And of course, the context of all that was going on in the Galatian churches is "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another and envying one another." That's why so much of the list in verse 20 has to do with strife and jealousy and rivalries and anger and dissension and division, because that was going on. And I'm sure all of us could admit, especially those who know us the best, that there's plenty of that that wants to seep out of our lives. Well, God's solution is for us to produce a crop that the Spirit is there saying, "I'd like to produce in you love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Those nine things will be the focus of what we want to develop.

Before we ever get there and by way of introduction today, because love will be really seen throughout this whole list, I want to spend a little bit of time thinking about what this means. Let's start with something that I think is misunderstood. I probably wouldn't even come here if it weren't for the fact that this week in studying this passage, I heard people chiming in in the things that they write and the things that they preach about this passage. One common idea is that all of this fruit is for YOU to enjoy. In other words, they say produce the Spirit's fruit in your life because God wants you to imbibe in that, he wants you to eat that, he wants you to enjoy that. So all these things are really for you. Bear good fruit so that YOU can enjoy these things.

I hope you recognize, as I emphasize and articulate that, that that couldn't be further from the truth. Matter of fact, I've already given you the first seven verses of Isaiah Chapter 5, and I would certainly recommend you write that down and spend some time looking at it. The Bible's very clear that the garden is God's garden. This is for him. In our Daily Bible Reading there is a great passage coming up in Psalm 11 verse 7. It says, "The Lord is righteous and he loves righteous deeds." Do you know what he loves? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. He loves those things. He creates people and he loves when those people produce those things. He is a righteous king, a righteous judge, a righteous one who loves when people do those things. He enjoys the fruit of his crop. That's the whole point of Isaiah Chapter 5



verses 1 through 7. I created this group of people "on a fertile hill," he says. I've invested in them. I've tilled. I've toiled, he says. And I expected to find grapes there and I didn't. I found bad fruit.

I built a wall. I protected them. I gave to them. I invested in them. And they didn't produce a good crop. That's why I say, if God wants peanuts, well will we produce peanuts? Well, I don't like peanuts. It doesn't matter if we like peanuts. This is a crop that we're giving to God. You might be saying, you technical types, well, you know what? I know what the Bible says in Acts Chapter 17, it's very clear that there's nothing we can do to serve God. Right? He's not served by human hands as though he needed anything Paul says to the Athenians. Well, that's true. In the Old Testament we saw the same thing. In Psalm 50, he says, "If I were hungry," which of course he never is, "I wouldn't ask you." he says. We often quote this out of context, but the context of this next verse is that God doesn't need anything because I own the cattle on "a thousand hills." We always think of that when we want a few of those from God. But that context was, you know what? I own everything. I don't need anything from you. So what's this about producing a crop for God?

Well, though he doesn't need it, Malachi Chapter 1 says his people are called by God to bring him things that they produce, very physically in that sense because the farmers and these herdsmen would bring their crops and they would bring their herds and they would offer them to God. The Bible says that God is pleased with those things. He's honored by those things like a son honors a father or a servant honors his master. He says you, like a citizen, when you offer something to your governor, it's not that he needs it, he's going hungry. He says but you certainly wouldn't bring him blind and lame animals. If you're going to bring a gift, which, of course, bringing a goat to a governor is probably not the thing that he would appreciate. Let's not think about our governor right now, but the idea of bringing things to someone who is important. It's not that they need them. It's that it's an act of and a gift that does bring a sense of honor with it. And it's a good thing. You bring flowers to someone's house when they invite you over for dinner. It's not as though, man, you know what? They just don't have enough flowers in their house. It's an act and a token of your gift to them. And it's well-pleasing. It's well-received.

And in Malachi, when he says, I want good gifts from you, bring good things to me. And of course, we can think about the practicals of all of that from an Old Testament perspective about the first fruits and the, you know, the blemishless animal. But let's talk about the things that are most important. The things that God wants from us is a character that produces these virtues of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. That's what God would like to see from his people. And he's produced the people right here as he looks down at South County and he sees his garden and he doesn't want it to look like the Chaz garden. He wants it to look like a vibrant garden you'd find if someone spent a lot of time producing good fruit in that garden. That's what he wants.

And so I understand whose garden it is. If you are a note-taker, I guess I'll put it this way. "Remember That We Live For God's Benefit." That's what I'm trying to say. Remember that we live for God's benefit. Some of us learn the catechisms. They've got a lot of catechisms in the Protestant church as well as the Catholic church and the Eastern church. But the catechism is a



way to teach kids things about the Bible, about theology. The first one is always something like this: "What is the chief end of man?" Smiled at me if any of you learned those and memorize those things. I think I got a nickel for everyone I memorized as a kid. What is the chief end of man? And the answer, of course, is "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever" Now, there's great joy in that. This is not all just of servitude, but that's the point. It's to glorify him. I want to do everything so that the Creator is pleased.

That's so critically important for us to remember the fact that I'm supposed to say I want to be more loving, I want more joy, more peace, more patience, more kindness, more goodness, more faithfulness, more gentleness, more self-control. Because those are the things that would please him. It's not the chief end of man to glorify yourself. That's how most people live. As a matter of fact that's why the other soil in this world doesn't bear any good fruit to God because they're not thinking about the kind of product that they want to offer to God. They want to produce things in their life that please themselves. So our focus is in all of these things, how can these aspects of my life please the God who made me? That's just a shift in thinking. Because I've heard it from Christians writing and preaching about the fruit of the Spirit, I just want to make it clear this fruit is not for you. Will you enjoy it? Of course, there's great byproduct benefit for you and I. But the point of the fruit of the Spirit is to produce to God a people zealous for good works that he likes. Psalm 11:7, "He's righteous and he loves righteous deeds." Does he need us to do anything? Obviously he doesn't need anything from us, but the fruit that we produce is well-pleasing to him.

If you ever need any clarification about that truth, I love Romans 11 verse 36. It couldn't say it any more clearly as philosophical as it sounds, but listen carefully. It's all-encompassing. Here's the philosophy of life right here. "For from him" God, "and through him and to him are all things." Think that one through. "From him," he created us all. He created all this. Everything you do is created by him. I mean, he's created your food. He's created your lungs. He's created the blood in your bloodstream. He's created your teeth and your ears and your eyes and your hair. He's created everything that you can imbibe and eat and have and experience in this world. He's created those good things. "All things are from him and all things are through him." If he were not keeping you alive, as Paul said to the Athenians, "In him we live and move and," exist, we "have our being." He sustains all things by the words of his power. All things are through him.

So he's keeping you alive for as long as he chooses to keep you alive and all things are to him. All things are "from him" and "through him" and "to him." That means that my whole direction in life shouldn't be like the soil that's outside of this garden where everyone just says, "I just want to live for myself. I just hope to get through and be happy." When you say things like, parents, "I want my kids... I just want them to be happy. I don't care what they do in life." See you're absolutely reflecting the philosophy of the world and that's not what God wants. He wants us to glorify him, the chief end of man, the ultimate end of human beings. The whole goal and purpose is for us to please him. And you know what he likes? He's articulated it: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.



Now, there's more to it than that. We can make a list of 90 things. But those nine things God-breathed in the Scripture in Galatians Chapter 5 should help us to draw a target and to say this is what God wants, I live for his glory, he deserves it and he expects it.

Our passage, even as I read it, I hope it didn't discourage you. I want to tell you in the second part of this message, I don't want you to be discouraged at the struggle because clearly all of these good things, the fruit, is all in the context of a struggle. Your flesh does not want to produce these things the way that God wants them produced. The world's got their own version of every one of these things, and they're all about how I can live a life with certain things in my life that make me happy. God says, here are nine things that I want to produce because they glorify me. Then the Bible says, if you do what I'm asking, it's going to be hard, it's going to be a struggle, it's going to be work. I put it this way, if you're taking notes, "Don't Get Discouraged With the Struggle" because it's clearly built into the context of the passage. I mean, that community garden with cardboard and some tarps and a couple of bags of topsoil and a couple saplings they put in there that someone brought them from Home Depot. Right? It is discouraging, I suppose, in a fallen world when it doesn't work out and you have to beg for Gatorade and, you know, nutrition bars.

But I would tell you this, don't get discouraged. We've got to produce good fruit and God wants to produce good fruit. God is greater than all the things in my life that would make it hard for me. I know that this can be a success, even though it's a struggle, because the people closest to you know how much of a struggle it is. I don't want any wives to elbow their husbands and I don't need any groans right now. But there are a lot of people that know you're not very loving a lot of the time, that there's not a lot of joy, there's not a lot of peace, there's not a lot of patience. This is something that the closer people are to you, the more they see the struggle in your life and the failures in your life. I just don't want you to be discouraged.

There are a few things you need to have in place if this is ever going to work. Jot this reference down, if you would, Matthew Chapter 15 verse 17. Matthew 15:17, verses 17 through 20. Wow! Did you get all that? Here's one thing you're going to need: a new heart. Some of you are here in a church culture and I don't know why. Some of you are dragged here, brought here, coaxed here, I don't know what. In California, not many people are expecting you to be at church this morning, but maybe there's an expectation and you're here for some reason and you're not really a Christian.

And there's no "really" to you, you either are or you aren't. I would say this based on that passage, Jesus said the problem really comes from the heart. Out of the heart come all the things in that flesh list. When your flesh and your heart are in sync and all they want are the things that are in that list, the dissension, the envy, the strife, the drunkenness, the, you know, the sexual immorality, the sensuality, all the things that just make me happy, when my heart and my flesh are together on this, well then it's a lost cause. I need the battle to ensue. The battle starts when I get a new heart, as it says in Ezekiel, my heart of stone that's dead to God now becomes a heart of flesh and it's alive to God and it wants what God wants, and what God wants us to bear good fruit.



So that struggle starts with making sure I got a new heart. In a group this size, there's got to be people here who do not have that. I want you to take a good look in the mirror of God's Word and say, am I really a Christian? You don't become a Christian by coming to church. You don't become a Christian by walking an aisle, by getting baptized, by praying a prayer. You get saved by genuine repentance. I'm turning from a life of living for myself. I'm saying no more of this. That's what the works of the flesh are. It's all about me. Second Corinthians 5:15, "I no longer," now as Christians, "live for myself, but I live for him who died for me and rose again." It's the whole perspective of the first question in most catechisms. That is, what's the chief end of man? It's now to glorify God. Before it was just to get by, to be happy, to be satisfied.

So real repentance is a turning from that separation from God and then trusting in the work of Christ to take care of all the problems that I can't solve on my own, which is I'm not qualified to be with God to start with. I've fallen, I was born in a fallen situation. I was on a bus that was careening off of a cliff. I can only get out of this bus that's headed to the penalty of my own sin if Christ were to solve the problem for me. Real repentance and real faith. The Bible says that changes our heart, regeneration. It's a renewed heart, an internal part of me that changes. It rewires me. Paul likes to talk about the old man and the new man. I was internally something and now I'm something else. And now the battle ensues. But it starts with even having a new heart. Because if all you've got is a bad heart and a fallen flesh, a few words from a sermon may inspire you for half an hour, but it's not going to ever give you any success in being the kind of person who produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It won't work. So I need a new heart.

"Well, I got a new heart, Pastor Mike. I know I'm a Christian. I put my trust in Christ. I've repented. I've seen fruit in my life." Great. Here's the second thing you're going to need to use the analogy of fruit. John 15 says you're branch, Christ is the vine, and a branch cannot bear fruit if it's apart from the vine. So here's the thing. You need to, and it's repeated over and over again, you need to abide. You need to remain. This Greek word just you need to make sure you stick with Christ. Now, in a world where everything's wanting to pull you away from the biblical God and the Christ who saves us, you know you've got to work hard to stay close to God. Now, I know that's an analogy, just like the whole branch and the vine is an analogy, but think about this for a second. You have to decide to, as it says in James, you have to "draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." You have to, as a Christian, recognize all the forces pulling you away. Passivity is going to mean you drift away from God. It's like being in a river, not in a lake, where if you get in the river and you have a dock here, you're going to be downstream unless you swim and work to stay close to that dock. You have to remain. You have to abide.

So you need a new heart. You need to abide. And then I'd like you to turn to this one, turn to the book of Ephesians, Ephesians Chapter 5. This is what we're going to do for the next nine weeks. We need to define the target. We need to know what we're shooting for. Because if you're listening to the radio and trying to define what love is, guess what? You're going to have the wrong definition. If you read things in this world about what love is, you're going to come to the wrong conclusions. So we need to define these things. I need to be a student. I've got to be a student of the Bible so that I can say this is what God's fruit is like. Right? So I'm not calling..., I'm



not calling a peach a peanut. I need to know what the differences are. I need to understand what this is. So we need to study. We need to know what we're shooting for.

Ephesians Chapter 5, look at verse 1. He says, "Therefore be imitators of God." Now this is a great set of verses, two verses. Therefore be imitators of God. This Greek word, "mimetes." We get the word "mimic" from it. Mimic him. See what he does and do what he does. As, by the way, here's the thing, at the top of the list, "the greatest of these is love." You're beloved children. He loves you. So imitate that. See the love and respond to that. Be like him. And let's get more specific, how about the second person of the Godhead, verse 2. "And walk in love." Live a life that reflects that kind of divine love, "as Christ," here's the human example of it. Right? All God, all human "as Christ loved us." And here's what he did. He "gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

You turn on love and you're not going to see that. Martyrdom is not going to be a definition of love on the 80's pop channel. Right? It's just not. It's going to be all good feelings and how you make me feel and, you know, you make me happy and you complete me.

I guess if you turned to a Christian station and there was a real well-written Christian song, you might hear that's the definition of love. Right? That no one has any greater love. Right? No greater love has anyone than this, that a man would lay down his life for his friend. That's not romantic love. That's not passionate love. That's not love that the world defines as self-gratifying. It's a giving, sacrificial kind of love. We need to understand what it is. He "gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to..." us. Underline the word "us." Look at your Bibles and underline the word "us." See that there? A sacrifice to us. Do you see that? Sunday morning crowd is that there? No, it's not there. He "gave himself as a sacrifice..." what are the last two words of verse 2 of Ephesians 5, "to God." Again, this is the garden perspective. He loves ultimately to bear fruit to God. He doesn't do it to us. It's not a sacrifice to us. It's a sacrifice to God. And that has to be so clear in my life. I need to live a life of love because I want God to see it as a fragrant sacrifice, as an offering that God goes, "I love that." That's the picture. We need to understand that love.

Go back two Chapters, Ephesians Chapter 3. He prays for this. He prays that they'll get this. Ephesians Chapter 3 verse 14. "For this reason I bowed my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." All the derivation of all the life of the world that has lived and is living, it all comes from God. It's all derived from God. "That according to the riches of his glory," he's a big God, a powerful God, a mighty God, "he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being."

So God, the connection with God that I have is the third person of the Godhead, right now. And that Spirit is going to get me to actually see and visualize and understand the second person of the Godhead, verse 17, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Now he's somewhere else. His fingernails, his toenails, his eyelashes, his elbows, his knuckles are in a whole other place. He left. But he's going to dwell by faith in my heart in that everything about Christ, I'm going to get it, I'm going to see it, I'm going to understand it because he's the living



example of what we're about to get into, and that is love. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith so that you, being rooted and grounded," talk about bearing fruit, I'm deriving all of the fruit that I produce because I'm "rooted and grounded in love." What kind of love? The kind of love that Christ demonstrated. The kind of love that I'm supposed to imitate that comes from God and "may have strength to comprehend." That's what we need. This is the whole point that I'm trying to make. "Comprehend with all the saints." We all need to do that. That's why we're going to teach on it here. And not just love, but all the things that spring from it. "What is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth."

"The breadth and the length and the height and the depth and to know the love of Christ," I need to know it and I need to understand it, "that surpasses knowledge." Well, there's an oxymoron. How do I know the love that surpasses knowledge? That's the point. You will always continue to learn. So if you say, "Oh, I've come to church, learn about the fruit of the Spirit, I learned about that, you know, 1973 and I know all about it." Listen, you cannot fully explore the depths of these fruits. You can't, I mean you could spend your whole life studying what it is that God loves us and now he says you go do that. So we got a lot to learn and these are going to be good weeks of study, Lord willing, as we start to comprehend the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of all of these virtues, starting with love. "To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." That's what I want. He's going to say that in Chapter 5 verse 1, imitate that God. That's the picture we've got to know the love we imitate.

So those things are critical. I don't want you to get discouraged. If you have a new heart. Great. Now we've got to fight to stay close to that God and now we have to learn and we have to study, we have to be students. Which, by the way, the number one word that Jesus used of his followers. He calls them disciples, "mathetes." It's the Greek word that we get mathematics from. You're a learner. You're a student. You pull things out. You take notes. You understand how this works. You figure it out. You think through it. You comprehend with all the saints. We're all learners that we can know the most fundamental and most important virtue of all. Faith, hope and love, the greatest of these is love. This is where it starts.

So don't be discouraged if you haven't seen as much of this in your life as you want. Proverbs 24:16, "A righteous man falls seven times, but rises again." Some people may roll their eyes thinking that you're going to try to become a more loving person. Don't be discouraged. God wants to see this happen. God wants to see you understand it better. God wants to see this developed more fully in your life and that's what we're here to do for the next nine weeks.

So let's, summarizing all that, leads right into the third point, if you're taking notes, "Aim At God's Version of Love." And that's really what we need to talk about. So here's the real sermon. It comes at the end of the sermon and here are three things. I want to distinguish these from the world, the way the world understands love and the way that we're to understand love. Let's just quickly run through these.



Letter "A." So this is three, you understand? We're aiming at God's version of love, Letter "A." Here it is. "It's Selfless, Not Selfish." It's selfless was not selfish. Listen to every love song on the radio. Read any romance novel. You know, think about what people mean when they say "I love you." Right? And usually it falls so far short of real love because the orientation is you make me happy, you fulfill me. I enjoy loving you. I enjoy loving you. It's about me. Selfish fulfillment. Real biblical love is not that way. It's not self-serving. It's selfless. It's not selfish.

Romans Chapter 15 says that we should "not please ourselves, but we should please our neighbor for his good," verse 2, "to build him up. For Christ did not please himself." Even Christ didn't please himself. When you think about Christ coming to the planet and if the expression of love is him dying, being spat upon, being beaten, being mocked, being dressed in a purple robe, having people make fun of him and say there's our act of love, that he got tied to a post and had his back fileted open by a Roman whip. There's love for you right there. You're thinking there's no self-pleasing in that. No, he gave himself as an offering to God in all of this. He said, God, I hope you're pleased with this act of love and its sacrificial. It's not self-serving. It's selfless. It puts myself in the backseat.

When Paul said to the Philippians in Philippians Chapter 2, one of the best examples of our Christology of what Christ was in his sacrifice for us, it starts with this. He says, hey Philippians, if there's any comfort in love, if you want love in your church, he says this, then you need to put other people's interests before your own. I'll just read it. Philippians Chapter 2. It says this: "Make my joy complete, having the same love, being of one mind and do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others as more significant than yourself." If you want to know why most of us don't love well, it's because we don't see that the actions, the behaviors and the words that I'm about to speak are really about you and benefiting you. That's the reorientation of love.

There are a lot of people, as First Corinthians 13 says, that have a lot of things in place when it comes to Christianity. They have a lot of knowledge. They have a lot of faith. They can do a lot of things. Matter of fact, I see it all the time. I can think of faces and I would be embarrassed to tell you who they are. Some of them you might know that know a ton of theology, church history. They know the languages. They know all kinds of spiritual things. They're ambitious. They're great leaders. But in First Corinthians 13, the first two verses it says, "If you have all of that," and then verse 3 says, "but you don't have love, you're nothing." You're nothing. Everything you do is just a noisy, clanging gong. Well, not to others. They think it's great. But to God, it's just noise. You've got to do all this because we love people.

A few chapters earlier, five chapters earlier, he says in First Corinthians Chapter 8 verse 1, he says the problem is so many people have knowledge and their knowledge and the things that they think they know, particularly about Christianity, it "puffs them up." Picture that's as a spatial analogy. It makes them bigger. He says, "But love builds them up." It edifies. That's what that word means. So I'm thinking I can do things, say things, pursue things, make goals in my life that build me up. Or I can do things, think things that build them up.



And know we're thinking, well, who's going to take care of me? That's the God thing. God says, I'll take care of you. You worry about building other people up. You worry about putting their needs before your own. You worry about making them in you're thinking more significant than yourselves. The problem with our world, isn't it, is selfishness. And love is not selfish. If it's anything, it's not selfish, biblical love. Yet, if you have the right combination, people love each other, not just in romantic relationships, but in friendships because they get something out of each other and that becomes the relationship and that's not love, see. That's a selfishness. The Bible says real love is not about selfishness. It's not about self-serving. It's about selflessness.

Aim at God's version of love. That's the first thing, the second thing is it's actions, not feelings. Love, when you use the word love we picture some 13-year-old with her, you know, picture of a cat and a heart or whatever. Or making symbols with her fingers saying, "here's my heart." I just want to say it's not about feelings. It's not about passion. When Jesus went to the Garden and said, I'm going to choose to love these people for your sake, your will, not mine, he didn't feel any green fuzzies for us at that point. It's not about feelings. It's about action.

He decided to do something in a major way. "Greater love has no one than this that he lays down his life for his friends." And you're my friends if you do what I command, Jesus says. And what I want you to do, I want you to love each other. "By this, all men will know you're my disciples if you love one another." I'm quoting now through John 13 through 15. That whole picture of Jesus saying that's what you need to do. And it's not about your feelings. If you're waiting for your feelings, you'll only wait when you find a benefit in loving someone, and I'm saying you love people without any thought of what you'll get in return because I'm not waiting for feelings. I'm deciding to act. Which often, as I like to put around here, means you stay the extra hour, you go the extra mile and you spend the extra dollar. It's a sacrifice.

I have to have you look at this one. First John. First John Chapter 3. First John Chapter 3. Here's the picture. It couldn't be any clearer than this. It just so happens that, you know, a thousand plus years after these things were written, they were numbered. It just so happens that John 3:16 looks a lot like First John 3:16 in God's providence. But take a look at this. Verse 16. First John 3:16. You know, John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son." Here it says "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us." Not only did the Father give his Son the Son gave his life willingly to us, and here's the response. "We ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." That's huge. Think about that. I am willing, if I love someone, to even die for them. Think about if we had a church, a garden where the people in that garden are producing the fruit of saying no matter what it takes, I would put your interests before my own and I would be willing to die for you. That's huge. That's life-transforming. That's community transforming. "Lay down your lives for the brothers." I think it would be easier if I think that way to go the extra mile, stay the extra hour and spend the extra dollar for your good.

Verse 17. Here's an example. "If anyone has the world's goods sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him." He doesn't have any interest in having any kind of sympathy for that. "How does the love of God abide in him?" Well, I didn't feel it. That's what he's going to say. And the whole point is you don't have to feel it. It's not about feelings. It's about actions.



"Little children," verse 18, "let us not love in word or in talk." He's already dealt with in verse 17 our feelings or passion. "But in deed and in truth." What is it that needs to be done? What need can I meet? What deed can be done? What thing could be stated? What letter can be written? Love is actions not feelings.

Thirdly, it's sacrifice. It's not having something I want. It's giving up a comfort in my life. It's sacrifice, I put it this way, not convenience. It's sacrifice, not convenience. I just want you to think of the spatial analogy that's given about the breadth and the length and the height and the depth. These two dimensions. Right? In that way, it's a three-dimensional description. I get it. But if I think about how deep someone's love is, I think about how much does it cost them to love that person? There's the cost. This volume this way. Then if I think about the length and the breadth, this is how long it is. That helps me in terms of time. I think about the depth of cost and I think about the length of time. How long am I willing to do that? I think that's going to prove whether or not this is feelings and passion or whether this is commitment and action. Sacrifice versus convenience is saying I'm willing to sacrifice, whether it's a deep cost, whether it's stopping for a gallon of milk or whether it's giving up my life for you, and I'm thinking about the length, whether it's next week, two weeks from now or 50 years from now, I can go the distance here. That's love. It's a sacrifice, not a convenience.

Jeremiah 31:3. This is the Lord's love. The Lord says, "I loved you with an everlasting love." There's the length of it. "Therefore, I have a continued faithfulness to you." Right? Think about that. Faithfulness day in, day out, year, decade. When it turns into 30, 40, 50, 60, 70 years. Think about that. That's love because of the length and the breadth of love. That's sacrifice, not convenience.

I don't want to saddle you just with a bunch of descriptions and to say, hey, that set of authors and pastors who say all this fruit is for you, they were completely wrong because they're not completely wrong. I think they're fundamentally wrong in that they're getting us to think that all this is for us. It really is for God. But God is so good that when he tells us to bear this fruit, when you become a farmer in your life who bears more of this fruit, it is a good thing for you. You get to enjoy the fruit of it as well. But it's a byproduct.

Let me give you an example. I talked about these three things, that it's selfless, not selfish, it's not self-serving. But Acts 20:35 says Jesus is quoted saying, hey, "It's more blessed to give than to receive." Now, here's the thing. In the end, you'll recognize, though it may have not been filled with convenience or passion, that in the end I realized that there was something better even for me. Blessed. There was something more gratifying for me. It did serve the self in the end. Not that I sought it, but as a byproduct, man, I was encouraged by the fact that I gave whether it's the extra hour, the extra dollar or the extra mile.

How about this: talk about feelings, it's not about feelings, it's about actions. Well, this is a good thing. We say this all times in a counseling office. Let's just do the action that's a loving action and let's just see, maybe the feelings will drag behind it. In the wake of that action, maybe the feelings



will just, like a vortex, it'll be sucked into that whole process. Choose to do a loving thing that sacrificial, it serves the person, and see if the feelings don't catch up. Here's the example in Philippians 1. Paul's in prison. He is suffering because he loves the Philippians and he says here there are a lot of feelings that have really percolated in my life, verses 7 through 9. "I hold you now in my heart, I feel like you're in prison with me and that you're standing in defense and in confirmation of the Gospel with me. God is my witness, how now I yearn for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it's my prayer that your love me abound more and more with all knowledge and discernment."

So make those decisions and see what happens. Paul says, "Now I have all of this feeling." Oh, it's not about feelings, but feelings often accompany. If they don't, they don't. But so often they do. That's why those who really love end up sometimes being the happiest, "blessed are those who give," and they end up with the feelings that are the most joyful. I said sacrifice, not convenience. I said that. Right? It's funny when you choose to sacrifice for someone, how the Bible says that becomes increasingly convenient because the whole way you approach life is different.

When Jesus was asked to eat a meal in this Samaritan town, the disciples showed up with Taco Bell and said, "Here, have lunch. We went into town to get it for you. Why are you sharing the gospel with this woman? Why are you caring about this person? Why are you putting her needs before your own? You're hungry, Rabbi, eat." Jesus' response, remember that in John 4:34, he says, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." "I'm now finding that it's convenient for me in my own disposition, my own heart, to sacrifice and put her needs before my own." Paul got to that place in his life. Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 15. He says, "I can most gladly spend and be expended, sacrifice for your souls." Gladly. I find joy in it. It becomes my convenient default.

I don't know if it's a faux pas or not. Don't tell my mom I use the illustration, but I think I remember when I was a young kid, she had a bowl of plastic fruit on the coffee table. I mean, we lived in a blue-collar home, so we didn't have fresh flowers and real fruit. But, I mean, I ate fruit occasionally, but I'm just saying. I just remember just what that was like to go over there as a little kid and toddle over to that bowl of plastic fruit that became projectiles in my home. I remember them getting dusty and I just thought it was a weird little experience in memory in my youngest, youngest years, I thought of those recently when I was at the restaurant and they came around with that tray of desserts that are made of plastic. Did you not go to that restaurant? It's like, OK. It looked good from across the room. I thought, she's bringing us dessert. She thinks it's my birthday, but it's made of plastic. She gets close enough and I wouldn't want to put my fork in it.

I'm just saying that the world is filled with you looking at people who claim to have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But when you see it from a distance, you don't realize it's not real fruit. It's plastic fruit. It's an imitation. It's artificial. God has real fruit for us that he wants us to bear. A real piece of chocolate cake. There it is. If you stuck your fork in that, it would be so moist. It would be so good, it would be so fulfilling.



I want us not to settle for the imitations. The only way we're going to get there is to study carefully what the target is and to say, God, I want to produce more of that in my life. The Spirit says, "I've been waiting for you to say that." He's so ready to take us from where we're at to the next level. Isn't that in some ways just to experience the real thing and not the fake thing a reward in itself? Think about the great chapter of love, which I'm going to turn you to in your discussion questions as you get to your small groups this week. "Love, it's patient, it's kind, it doesn't envy it, it doesn't boast, it's not arrogant. It's not rude, doesn't insist on its own way. It's not irritable. It's not resentful. It doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing. It rejoices in the truth. It bears all things. It believes all things. It hopes all things. It endures all things." Just think if that were the characterization of your life and your home and your church, that's a reward in itself. We want that.

Paul was seen often times as a hard-nosed teacher. He said the true thing when it was even hard to hear, and yet when it was all said and done, he said to Timothy in First Timothy Chapter 1, he said, the goal of our instruction, "The aim of our charge," as the English Standard Version puts it, the whole point and reason for all of this teaching "is love." I want more love in the people I preach to. May that be the thing that God sees growing and sprouting afresh in our church.

Let's pray. God, give us more love in our church, give us more love in our lives. Let us not get discouraged if we look at our lives and see that there are a lot of areas of our life that don't have this kind of love, that there is a lot of rudeness or envying or strife or jealousy or whatever it might be. God, give us a sense that you can, as you get involved in our thinking, in our hearts, as you move us closer to you, as we abide more intimately with you, that we become more loving. God, we need that in our lives. We need that in our church. I almost said we need it in our world. Of course we do. But they're never going to have it without a new heart. So as we often say, as we've been studying in Acts, we want to be more evangelistic, but we want to make sure that those people who we're reaching with the gospel see our lives and say I know them by their love, that they are different, the quality of their fruit, man, it's real. So let us love and love better because we spent some time in your Word today.

In Jesus name. Amen.