**A Loving Community, Part 2**

**Romans 12:9-11 (ESV)**

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We’re in Romans chapter 12. We’re thinking about Paul speaking to this church at Rome. God has preserved His Word and we’re thinking about how the Spirit would speak and have us apply it to ourselves as a church family and then apply it specifically and individually, about how we can build one another up.

***9*** *Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.* ***10*** *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.* ***11*** *Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, 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.*

There was a preacher who told a story about a man walking down the street and he passed by a used bookstore. He looked in the window and he saw a book with the title *How to* *Hug*. The title intrigued him. He wasn’t sure there was a lot to learn about the topic, but a whole book of instruction seemed interesting. So he went in to buy the book. Inside the store, he was disappointed to discover that the book was actually the third volume of an encyclopedia covering the subject of how to hug. It was a work that appeared to offer real practical help and turned out to just be a mere academic paperweight.

Contrary to what some might believe, the Bible was never intended to serve as a dusty theological encyclopedia nor were churches to be places where love was a mere academic idea. The Bible is about a real world with real families, real problems and a real God who brings real hope and shares real love with real people. It’s a message of good news. It’s a gospel that is so amazing that Paul, the writer of Romans here, can hardly contain himself. He is pouring his heart out to this church in Rome that is filled with people he has not even met. He is exploding with passion over the shared belief of this message of hope that sinful man can be reconciled to righteous God through faith in Jesus’ death in their place. This is the Gospel message that Paul unpacks. If you share that passion, would you say ‘Amen’? (Amen!)

This is the message that Paul is so excited about. He wants to proclaim it. He writes to this people, this church, about this plan of God to rescue sinners from judgment under the Law through this gracious and loving gift that God offers, Himself, His own Son, God as a man, here to fulfill the Law on our behalf. Jesus came and He suffered the condemnation that guilty sinners like us deserve in order to pay for our sins sacrificially, making atonement, reconciling us to God. It’s a message of how God does the impossible. That’s why we’re here. It’s because of this gospel. We’re people from all different walks of life, all different backgrounds. We’re not here because we like certain music, we like certain cultural norms, we have similar professional ambitions or we have biological ties. We’re here because of Jesus.

That’s what was going on in Rome. Two communities that never would have done anything together, Jew and Gentile, gathered into this new community called the church. It’s a new community that Paul initially thought was a vile offense, this mixture of Jew and Gentile. He was a Pharisee of the most zealous sort. He found his identity and his hope in striving to follow the Law as taught by the Pharisees through this self-righteousness that very frequently manifested in a separation from and a disgust for anything to do with the Gentiles. So this idea of mixing together this message of forgiveness and welcome to God’s people being extended to those who would not become Jews through grace was revolting. It was an affront to everything he had accomplished and stood for. He had dedicated himself to opposing this message and this people in every way. He was persecuting this church and throwing people in prison. On that way, he met Jesus and everything changed.

Now, instead of imprisoning others because of their following of Jesus, he himself was imprisoned for Jesus and he said, “This is nothing.” He had seen the light. God had opened his eyes that this message of hope for all mankind was actually true. His self-righteousness would never attain to anything. He needed someone to come and be righteous on his behalf and die and pay the punishment for his sins. That person was the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, who offered a true righteousness more complete than his. In fulfillment of God’s promise, His sacrifice in our place, the gift of His Spirit, He calls these people who trust in Him by faith into this new community called the church. So now Paul, who was a fierce opponent before, had been transformed and then dedicated now by God to advance this movement of Jesus’ followers around the world. He hadn’t even been to this place called Rome, but he had heard and his heart had been provoked because there were Jews and Gentiles in this place. He knew the kind of challenges that they might face, but he was desperate to preach this gospel message and see them live it out because he knew that this would transform them and this would actually be at work in them and through them. It’s a letter about God’s love.

This letter that Paul writes in Romans is exceedingly deep theologically. There are lots of heavy words. You see words like righteousness, atonement, judgment, repentance, circumcision, propitiation, trespasses, justification and condemnation. You see these kinds of words and that this is very theological. Paul wants us to understand the beauty of what God has done. In the first eight chapters, he talks about this gospel work of Jesus and what He has accomplished. It ends when you finally understand what God has done. There is an unbreakable love that we have of God through Christ and we’re inseparable from Him. Paul just bursts out. He didn’t have exclamation points there in the day, but you can tell and the translators put an exclamation point because he is so excited.

Then in the next three chapters, Paul understands that he’s writing to both Jews and Gentiles here in the same church. He explains why this is not a contradiction with God’s Old Testament promises. This isn’t a contradiction of what God had promised to Israel. It’s a continuation of the work and it’s yet to be fulfilled in full. It’s mysterious. It is deep, yes, but it is a beautiful picture of God’s glory on display. Jew and Gentile now in this thing called the church is at work in this unfolding community that is so crucial that they worship God together. He can hardly contain himself at the end of chapter 11. You can see just like at the end of chapter 8, he sort of cries out in this exclamation. He’s saying, “Who does this?!” Only God does something like this. So he cries out

**Romans 11:33** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

No one is like God!

**Romans 11:36** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

He’s amazing! There are eleven chapters of deep theology, which should always lead to doxology. If you truly see God, then you worship Him as God. But Paul is no mere academic. His concern is not only rational thought. His concern is very much about relational love. He knows this community is going to be fragile in a human sense. They’re fighting to overcome centuries of opposing customs and cultures. Their diversity presents challenges that they hadn’t even encountered before. So in chapter 12, he pivots.

He begins by establishing this relationship of the love of Jesus that restores relationship with man to God. This is an amazing miracle! But then he calls them to show how man can be in relationship with one another in the church and to sort of put the proof out there that God’s love will transform you by living in love for one another. This is the way that worship is pleasing to God. It’s that this diverse community would thrive in true love for Him and for each other despite different views on customs and challenges with the government and so much more that you’re going to read in the next few chapters. They were to thrive in love. It’s the kind of love that would have to stand out in this world because its origin would be unmistakable. You cannot conjure this kind of love. It comes from God.

Isn’t that what we want? Don’t we want a love like that here? We want to love in a way that everybody will say “This must be from God. I’ve not seen this anywhere else. Certainly, you couldn’t have created it. It came from somewhere divine.” That is the love of Christ and that is what the world is missing. Traveling through the week, you’ve seen this week a desperate desire for that kind of love. There is no shortage of counterfeits. We talked about that last week. Fake relationships are everywhere and our nation is overloaded with such superficial claims of love and community that we can hardly even stomach the discussion. It doesn’t matter if you’re in the Big Apple or Washington or Hollywood or beyond. This generation of reality tv is more connected than ever and more isolated. It’s more diverse than ever and yet so divided. This is human love, human community and it’s what makes God’s way so striking. They are a people who love because they’ve been perfectly loved by Him.

So as a church, we come and we let the Spirit transform us. Our mind is renewed. We’re not conformed to the way of the world, but we’re actually empowered to live out His love using the gifts that He gives in service to the people that He brings. That’s why we’re gathered. The miracle of relationship with God is possible and now He is saying, “I want you to love like me. Share this love.” The good news is that Jesus has accomplished it. He has done it and given us His Spirit to continue to accomplish this through us amongst each other. This is the kind of love we’re called into, a religious community that is actually true and where love thrives in contrast to the culture. It contrasts in such a way that this Jewish-Gentile community that was novel in a sense in Rome was actually able to thrive so powerfully that they outlasted the empire because it was from God. This is true love. This is what makes real togetherness possible. It’s a love that stands out as not generated by man but from God.

So this is what we’re looking at. It’s the kind of love that Paul says is going to cause you to actually join together as a sacrifice on the altar. In Romans 12, he says it’s going to join together like a member on a body, like a member of the family. You’re going to have gifts and use them to serve one another by the power of the Spirit. But he says all of that use of the gifts in verses 3-8 has to be controlled by this aim, which is love. Love is what gives life and meaning to all of the things that we do at church and beyond. That is what we want. It’s what we pray for.

We want to experience thriving biblical community. How do we cause that to thrive here? What do we need? We know we need love, but what does that love look like? Paul starts to unpack it for us. Last week, we touched on the first two. We’re going to keep moving through a few more this week. But the very first mark and sort of core principle about this love from God is that it is genuine. One of the defining marks of true Christian love, of Christlike love is

**#1 Genuineness: True Love Matters (12:9a)**

It’s real. It’s authentic. It’s actual. Love that is real and that is true, matters. He says

***9*** *Let love be genuine.*

We talked last week about how that is *agape* love, which is a little bit different than what the typical Greek would have said. It’s sort of this selfless decisive love that I’m going to give towards another. The word there means without hypocrisy. Let love be without hypocrisy, without the mask, without the games. Let it be real. This is something that we’re familiar with in our society because we’ve had so many simulations and counterfeits of love.

There was a study early on because they had this digital technology of movies and cartoons. The cartoon characters were becoming more and more human, more and more life like. People liked it. Audiences were reacting. This is cool! This looks like humans. We like the motion. But there was a point at which those tools were developed where they were able to make something look pretty close to human, but not quite. All of a sudden, audience reaction plummeted. They called it “uncanny valley” because it looked close, but not quite, and it creeped everybody out. (Laughter!)

That’s what happens in our world. Things look so close to being real, but it’s not quite there and it creeps everybody out. They realize that this is pretend. It’s fake. This is not unique to our church family or our city or our country or even our time in history. Paul knew the issue at stake and he said let love be without hypocrisy. That’s the same challenge that God’s followers have had from the beginning. Jesus came and struck at the heart of that and Paul knew it himself as a former Pharisee. Hypocrisy is to do things on the outside and go through the motions, but not be genuine on the inside. Paul says love from above, true love from God, love like Jesus, has to be genuine. It has to be real. All of the other commands that flow out of this really flow from the idea of a genuine love. That’s what Jesus said.

**John 13:35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

He’s talking about real, genuine, true love. Satan is going to come and he is going to attack God and say God isn’t real and His love is not genuine. Then he’s going to also attack the church family and say their love isn’t real. Their love isn’t genuine. Also, he’s going to flatter and say the love of the world is real. This is genuine. This is the place to go. But Paul says true love is found one place, in Jesus. Then it’s offered through His Spirit. His Spirit produces that kind of love. He says to let it be genuine. Let it be real. Cut through the pretense.

As an encouragement to those who have experienced that kind of hypocrisy, you’ve seen it and you think, “This is so difficult. This is so painful.” Just remember that no one has endured more hypocritical love than God. Jesus came Himself and had the Pharisees rejecting Him and His people struggling to accept Him. He said, even repeated from the words of Isaiah,

**Matthew 15:8** “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;

We’re intended to read and understand that it’s not that the Pharisees are the bad people. No, we look and we see those are people just like me. I am hypocritical in my love. Jesus endured betrayal by His own disciple with a kiss, and yet was faithful and genuine in His love. That is the love of God. Paul says to be captivated by that love and then be controlled by it. Love in a way that’s real. It matters that love is genuine. In fact, if you have genuine love, you don’t have to worry about what is the correct thing to say.

Sometimes we look at hard situations of people either celebrating or people in a tragedy and we think, “I don’t know what to say. I don’t know how to engage. I don’t know how to serve in this way or that way. I don’t know how I should sing. I don’t know how I should do this or that.” Have genuine love. Don’t worry so much about all the other things. The world will try to conform you to the outside and will say “This is what you can say and this is what you can’t say. Say it like this and not like this.” God says don’t worry so much about all that stuff. Just be real in your love. The pressure comes off. Let me just let God love through me. So genuineness is a key mark, but then secondly

**#2 Righteousness: True Love Has Standards (12:9b)**

This is the idea that love is not only true, but it has standards. There is a sense of, and this is uncomfortable for us, but discrimination in love. We see that in the Bible. Paul is not pulling punches. In verse 9 he says

***9*** *Let love be genuine.*

Okay, we’re talking about love. Then the next word there is

*Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*

So he’s talking about love and then all of a sudden, he uses the word “abhor.” This is the idea of shuddering or being repulsed by, of hating, of standing back from what is evil. You see, love is not sort of this indiscriminate niceness. Love is defined by God and He sets the object of our love and defines how it is to be expressed. It must be controlled by righteousness. This is an extreme idea in our world that would say, “We’re just going to be nice. We’re going to tolerate everybody.” But the world is not able to hold to that themselves. We in our natural human state might say something like that, but the world does have standards. If you start to provoke against the world’s standards, you will experience that kind of abhorrence. You know because you feel the pressure and the fear. When you’re walking into work and there is a certain conversation or you’re listening to some podcast or you’re in some class, you’re having a conversation and you realize we need to tone this down. This Bible verse is going to not be received very well because the standard of righteousness that God describes, the world will find it abhorrent and will be disgusted by it. But this is the standard that God has given.

We recognize and we look at it and it would also pierce us. It’s so hard to look at the Word and look at the Law. We feel sort of crushed by it. But what Paul has unpacked over the course of Romans is to say you don’t have to be afraid because all of that condemnation that you feel, Jesus has paid for it. You don’t have to be afraid of that righteousness anymore. That’s who Jesus is. He paid for it and He has given you His righteousness. Now He’s going to live that righteousness through you so you can love for real. You can love the way that God desires.

But that does mean abhorring what is evil and holding fast to what is good. It means clinging to, sticking to, gluing to, epoxy yourself to what is good. You almost think of a young child who sees a snake that has poison. There is an abhorrence and then there is a clinging to their parent. That thing can destroy me. It’s the word here for evil. It’s the same word used for the evil one, Satan, who would destroy. It’s the word we get pernicious from. The child will see that thing wants to destroy me and then cling to what is good. That’s what Paul says. Love is going to be controlled by righteousness. You’re going to cling to God. In this world, there are going to be things that come and you’re going to realize that thing will destroy me. As you grow in following Jesus more and more you’re going to realize this thing that I used to have a taste for, this thing that I used to love, I’m actually allergic to. It’s poison. I can’t stomach it anymore. It’s what Joshua was calling the people to.

**Joshua 23:8** but you shall cling to the LORD your God

**Psalm 101:3** I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.

I have to step away from these things and cling to what is good. True love has standards and those standards are not looking for righteous people of themselves. It is looking for people who have claimed the righteousness of Christ, people who are repentant, people who are turning from sin and clinging to God. This is always happening and we’re pursuing righteousness. So praise God for a church family that is committed to being genuine and confessing that “There are times when I’m not genuine. God, please forgive me. Help me grow. Help me be genuine because of you. It’s not because of me.” I’m thankful for a church family that says “We want to grow in righteousness. I want to love what is good. I want to turn from what is evil. God, help me to do that. Forgive me when I haven’t. Help me to grow in that.” That’s the church family that we’re a part of.

But where that is lived out, where the rubber meets the road for all of that is not when we’re with strangers or in our own minds. It’s shown when we’re with people who really know us. It’s shown when we’re with our family, and not only our family, but our church family. Here is where the rubber meets the road. This is where it’s going to be lived out. That’s why Paul says in verse 10

***10*** *Love one another with brotherly affection.*

True love is marked not only by genuineness and righteousness, but by

**#3 Fondness: True Love Cares (12:10a)**

It cares about actual people in relationship. There is an affection within the church family.

***10*** *Love one another with brotherly affection.*

This is one of so many one another’s in the Bible. We’re looking around and we need to have a brotherly affection for one another that is not just theological, but relational.

You’ve probably seen those sibling reunion videos where some siblings have been separated. There are twins or triplets maybe separated at birth. It’s been long years or decades and they come together. It’s not always the case, but there is often this incredible emotional bond in this moment where they’re connecting and they realize “Our facial structure is similar. We have similar personality traits. What have you been through? Here’s what I’ve been through.” There is this connection even without all the traditional family ties because they realize in this very mysterious way they’ve come from the same womb.

When we come together as a church family, we realize that we actually have the same Father; not biologically, but spiritually. God has actually done a work in us. It’s not that we’ve been born, but we’re born again and we’re discovering that we are siblings. We have the same spiritual heritage and the same spiritual DNA. There is something precious about that. Paul says you’re in a family. This is a different word than he used in verse 9.

In verse 9 he talked about *agape* love that is without hypocrisy. Here he talks about the *phileo* love, which is where we get the word Philadelphia. That city is named the city of brotherly love. It’s this friendly brotherly love. But he actually combines that word. So it’s brotherly love with this other love, which is sort of the love between parents and children. It’s a family kind of love. He combines those for sort of a powerful word to say a brotherly affection is sort of a mutual tender affection. It’s this family term.

When you think about family love, you kind of sometimes think of that picture of stick figures around a house. That’s kind of nice family love. But when you think about family love the way that it’s expressed in some of those deep moments, moments of especially good-bye, moments of deep pain, all of the sudden the family love, whether it’s the spouses or whether it’s the children or the parents and the child, there is this moment where the love is so intense that you almost can’t even take it. I remember when my mom was saying good-bye when I was going to come here. I think I was fifteen. I’m getting on the plane and there is this moment where it’s like, this is the moment. It was like there was nothing to say. The moment you would start to say something, she would look me in the eyes and she would be like, I can’t do it. I know some of you parents have gone to take your children to college. You go and it’s great, but whatever the moment happens, it’s like this is the time to express family love, but you’re like, I want this to be over. It’s just too much. It’s too intense, that kind of love, that kind of expression of care, that family love.

I know many of you were not able to be here for the service that was during the week, here. We had the passing of a young man and his family was here. You have the parents expressing love and then in the moment deciding that they were going to speak directly to their children. In that moment, that kind of love expressed is so intense that it’s almost like no one can look. It’s like we’re going to get crushed by this intensity. It’s too much.

Think about this. Why does everybody, when they come to see God, feel like I’m going to die? They start falling on their face and they say “I can’t look God in the face.” All the angels are covering their face. It’s too much unfiltered straight love, truth and light. It will destroy you unless you are perfectly pure and united. You say that’s the family love. It’s actually what I’ll say, Trinitarian love. This is what’s on God’s mind.

Do you want to know what people are thinking about? Do you want to hear them talking to themselves? You want to know what your kids are talking about and thinking about? You listen to them play with toys and talk to themselves. Do you ever hear God talk to Himself? When you look in the Scriptures, there are times when God speaks, but there is one very amazing time that Jesus in John chapter 17 prays to God His Father. You hear this moment of family love, of Trinitarian love. What is His plan? What’s on His mind? This is a key moment. Look at what Jesus says in John 17. He talks about that weight, that heaviness, that amazingness that would destroy most people.

**John 17:22-23** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one,

There is this welcome into this Trinitarian love. All this He says is

**John 17:23** …so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

This kind of love is what we’re being brought into. If you understand it, it’s so much that you have to kind of look away. He says

**John 17:24-26** Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

There is so much intimacy here. There is so much unfiltered love that it’s almost crushing. Jesus is saying and Paul is saying here, love one another with a brotherly affection, knowing you’ve been brought into this kind of love and family.

There was a teacher who had this broken down violin. The neck of the violin was hanging by its strings. It was passed around and people were looking at it. It didn’t seem like a big deal. The teacher told them to make sure they look at the base of the violin. They would see the name of the maker. He was a guy by the name of Stradivarius. He was one of the most famous violin makers. Everybody was like, “Whoa!”

We realize that when we are looking at one another, we’re broken. We’ve got mess. But we realize stamped on one another is “Made With Love By God.” We have the name of Jesus Christ. We’re a part of this family. The beauty of family is there may be different degrees of maturity, but we’re in the same family. Old and young and everyone in between, we all actually have the same belonging. We’re sons and daughters of the same Father and He is calling us to say love like that. Truly care not because you think someone is special or they have a personality that you appreciate. No, truly care because they have been loved by God and brought into this family. This is the kind of love that we get to be a part of. The wonder of the Gospel is we are adopted into this family. It’s precious. It’s powerful.

Robert Murray M’Cheyne said if you have an absent person, you love their picture. So a sailor’s wife takes out a picture every day and looks at it. It has some imperfections. It’s wrinkled. It has some distortions. But it looks like him and she holds it close. In fact, she is careful with it. Who or what is the picture of Jesus’ body in the world? Look around. It’s not the walls. It’s not the place. It’s the people. Yes, there are some distortions. Yes, there are some wrinkles. But we look and we cherish and we love because this reminds us of Jesus. Hopefully the world is looking and seeing how we relate to each other and how we’re quick to look for the good in each other. We’re quick to care for one another, refusing to put each other down. Even though we know each other’s worst habits and our deepest flaws and our most stubborn resistance to growth and change, we’re faithful or devoted in our love. This is the kind of love we’re to have for one another. So how do we do that? What does that deep fondness and affection within the family look like? We put others first. We’ll call that

**#4 Selflessness: True Love Puts Others First (12:10b)**

Biblical community thrives when true love is grounded in reality. It’s real. It thrives when it has standards of purity. It’s righteousness. It thrives when love shows affection through fondness and family. It also thrives when love lives out in humility and selflessness, when we put others first.

*Outdo one another in showing honor.*

Selflessness is the opposite of the competitive rivalry to try to be first. You know when the Olympics roll around and you see those runners sprinting across the finish line. At the last moment, they thrust their chest out and their arms back, just trying to get first. They’re striving to take the lead in being first. They’re trying to get to the spotlight. Paul says that’s not how love thrives. In the context of relationship and community in the family, it’s not about a pursuit of personal ambition or fame. It’s about taking the lead, but not to be first. It’s taking the lead to serve. It’s taking the lead to put others first. So the church should look a lot less like those Olympic sprinters trying to seize the lead and more like those synchronized swimmers who are under water treading and trying to keep everybody else up. They’re pushing and holding them and thrusting others to showcase the grace of God on display in them. They’re outdoing each other in showing honor. The word there is to give preference. It says take this lead in serving and giving preference to others rather than looking for the preferences of ourselves. It is selflessness.

There is no better example of that than Jesus. Think about Jesus. He was selfless over and over and over. Now He is coming to His moment of greatest need. He is about to go die and give His life and pay the penalty for our sins, for His people. Here He is and the disciples don’t get it. He could say, “I’ve been serving quite a bit, here. I’ve had thousands of people. There are no hospitals around. I’ve been healing everybody. They swarm in. I don’t get time to sleep. My own disciples are always arguing. I think I’ll just sort of sit here. It’s time for somebody else to do something.” No. He lays aside His robe and says, “It’s time for me to wash their feet.” So He washes their feet. Paul would capture that idea in Philippians 2. He was talking to this church and calling them to unity. This is a church where there was deep relational conflict. It’s a church where there were two people who were fighting and arguing. We don’t know the context, but he says this is what you need to do.

**Philippians 2:2-5** complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

It’s the same kind of mind he is talking about in Romans 12. It’s that we’re transformed by the mind of Christ Jesus. Jesus says to His disciples when they were arguing about who is the most important, who is first, that’s how the Gentiles are. That’s how the people of the world are going to be, but you shouldn’t be like this. He says

**Matthew 20:28** even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The only reason we can love is because God first has loved us. Jesus has given us the example that even though people are taking advantage, we can actually have the power to continue to love selflessly because that’s what God calls us to. He gives us the power to do it by His Spirit.

Sometimes we start to think that the problem is other people. So we experience a sort of disgust for how people are acting. We’re just sorrowful. We’re sad and we’re in deep distress. We say we can’t take it. Then sometimes we’re a little bit rude and we start to even succumb to some sort of vice. We disengage and we’re kind of indulging in thinking, “I just can’t handle it. If only those people were different.” You actually walk through each of the Fruit of the Spirit, love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self control. We don’t say “If those people were different, I’d get those things.” No, it doesn’t matter about the other people. Those things are a fruit produced by the Spirit. Despite what everybody else is doing, He can produce those things and you’re not held hostage to what other people are doing. The Spirit will work His way out in your life. The change starts within. God will transform you. This is the renewing of your mind that is going to live its way out in community. You’re going to outdo in giving honor to others.

Maybe you’ve been in some kind of suffering or some kind of care giving. Or you’ve been in ministry for a long time. You just think, we’re supposed to outdo one another in showing honor and I’m just so tired of winning. You’re making it a little too easy to win. You’re sitting there and you’re like, I’ve been pushing people up the whole time and I’m tired of the heels in my face as everyone pirouette’s above me and then there is the splash. I’m ready to actually not be the person who is winning in this every time. We just look to Jesus and realize that actually the beauty of humility might be showcased most wonderfully in that moment. The disciples never forgot that moment. Jesus could have given up, but in that moment, He actually chose to model humility. The same Spirit who empowered Him to model humility is the same Spirit we need to appeal to. God, please help me be humble like that, to take the lead in giving honor and showing preference to others. That kind of selflessness will bring such beauty and worship to a community where our world is everything but.

Now, all that serving, all that selflessness, all that treading and trying to hold people up, all that will wear us out. We get worn out. We get tired. We get fatigued. In those moments when we’re tired of all that, especially when we feel like others aren’t pulling their fair share, that why Paul reminds us here that community only thrives when true love hangs in there, when it lasts. True love is going to stand out because of its

**#5 Resilience: True Love Hangs In There (12:11)**

***11*** *Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

Resilience is true love that lasts. It hangs in there. You have to have experienced some kind of task where there is so much opposition that you just get worn out and you start going through the motions. It might be some kind of hard homework assignment that you’re doing and your mind is wandering. You’re kind of just turning pages. Or maybe you’re in front of your computer at the office and you’re thinking it’s just hard. You’re working and you’re trying to kind of look like you’re working, but you really just don’t know what’s happening. You’re worn out.

I remember times of working out. You have some kind of instructor and they’re telling you what to do. You’re doing it and then they look away and you’re kind of just going through the motions. We would do that at practice with basketball. We would run lines and we had this player who would literally drag his feet, leaving marks on the floor. We had to make it back by a certain time or we’d have to run it again. The coach would be yelling. The player would drag his feet and we would have to get back on the line. So we’d go and run again. Do you know what happened? All of us started dragging our feet. There would actually be competition, like a movie performance on who could run the slowest, but look like they were working the hardest to see if we could prove to our coach that we were working hard and we just couldn’t make it. Instead of actually trying to do what he was calling us to, we wanted to just look like we were dying. All of us were dragging our feet. It’s contagious. It’s discouraging. This can kind of happen where we get exhausted. We hit walls and we just get slothful in zeal. Paul gives a few reminders here, some short commands.

***11*** *Do not be slothful in zeal,*

Don’t lag behind. Don’t drag your feet. Don’t lose the zeal that you have. You know what that’s like if you’re on a tandem bicycle. You’re pedaling and all of a sudden it just feels hard. You look back and the person isn’t pedaling. They just took a break. Or you’re rowing and everybody is rowing. All of a sudden, it just feels really hard. You look back and you’re like, “Hey, where did everybody go?” Paul says don’t be slothful in zeal. Work together. Keep going in what you’re doing. He says

*be fervent in spirit,*

The word fervent there is this idea of boiling, like when water comes to a boil. Be enthusiastic or be on fire, like when metal is super heated and starts to glow. We’re to be boiling over. You know when you have your hot cup of tea or your coffee or whatever it is and it’s just hot and bubbling? It’s great! But then if you forget about it, you leave it out there and you go and get in a meeting or whatever it is, or the preacher is talking really long and you forget it. You come back and you’re like, oh yeah, my coffee. You take a sip and it’s lukewarm. It’s not boiling anymore. You can’t stomach it. You just throw that out. Sometimes that’s what happens. But Paul says no. Be boiling over. Be bubbling up. How does that happen? You have to stay on the heat. You have to let the Holy Spirit be working. Spend time with God and be on the burner. What does that look like? Well, there is an example of some people who started to kind of lose the zeal.

Look at the disciples following Jesus. Jesus is great! This is awesome! Then all of a sudden Jesus goes and He gets crucified and He dies. You talk about wind being out of the sails. Two disciples are walking away on the road to Emmaus. Then this guy comes and he’s like, “Hey, what’s going on?” They’re like, “Are you the only guy who doesn’t know how terrible it is? You don’t know what happened? Well, we thought it was going to be good, but it’s terrible.” Jesus is like, “Haven’t you read the Bible? Do you remember what it says in the Bible? Do you remember the promises of God? Do you remember this and this and this and this and this?” They’re like, “Yeah, I forgot it said that. Wait a second! Where does it say that again?” They’re sitting down and He breaks bread. Then all of a sudden their eyes are opened and they realize this was Jesus right in front of them. They had lost their zeal. He had risen already. He is there talking to them and they had no zeal until He was opening the Bible and explaining it. Then all of a sudden He was gone and they’re like, we have to change direction. We’re going back to the other disciples. They had renewed energy and they went back and said “Were not our hearts burning within us?” They were listening to the Bible, connecting it, and all of a sudden they realize and they saw Jesus and they’re like, we’re on fire again. Then they went back and they got energy out of nowhere. They thought there is no way we can be renewed, but they were on fire.

Sometimes you’re sitting there. You’re spending time in the Word. You’re spending time with people and the heat is going, but it’s like, I don’t see anything happening. Give it time. Spend time focusing on Christ and the boil will start. It’s contagious when you catch with somebody who is. You see the zeal and the fervor boiling over. Paul says to be like that. Be contagious. Be on fire. Be bubbling up with the work of the Spirit. Be fervent. At the end of the day, if you want help and encouragement in that, remember who you serve.

*serve the Lord.*

Don’t do these things for men. You look at people and you’re looking for their reaction. Are they happy? Is this working? Don’t do it for people. Do it for the Lord. Remember that God sees every single thing. People don’t see, but God sees. You will experience the fervency and the joy as you serve the Lord. What does that boil look like? What does it look like as a congregation? Well, it doesn’t just happen right here. It happens because we’re on the burner all week. We’re spending time talking to God, pouring out our heart. We’re reading some Scripture. We’re talking to each other. We’re encouraging each other. We’re confessing sin. We’re turning from sin. We’re saying I want to go back to God.

Then you come here and you’re like, I think I made it. I don’t know. All of a sudden, you’re singing and you hear the congregation and the church family singing. I hear a bubble. I hear a simmer. Something might be happening. We must have been on the burner for a bit. Then all of a sudden the congregation is ready to pray and you hear everybody say Amen. Then the congregation is ready to open the Word of God and we’re going to sit here. We’re not sitting here like I’m trying to be heat. No, we’re just experiencing what God has been doing in our midst and we’re listening and ready for God. Then we go and we do it. The congregation goes and we start to live it out and we start to apply what’s going on.

Then at lunch, you’re starting to discuss what does this mean? What does this mean for me? Then all of a sudden, we’re starting to spread. We’re starting to not only help each other become disciples, but we’re also starting to make disciples elsewhere. People who never heard about Jesus are all of a sudden showing up. What is going on over here? I can smell something bubbling. Something is cooking. Yes! You are smelling the aroma of Christ. Paul is calling us into that kind of community. Be drawn into this. You feel fatigued. You feel tired. Connect into what God is doing. Look at Christ. Be transformed and this actually will unfold in a way that transforms the community not only of the church, but all around you. It’s going to thrive. It’s going to be beautiful.

If anybody had an excuse to drag their feet, to get tired, if anybody had an excuse to say, “I’m going to take a break for now,” it was the perfect Son of God who was carrying His own cross for people who didn’t even care. They were spitting in His face. He appealed to God for help, but He didn’t drag His feet. He maintained His zeal. He accomplished what He came to do. He understood the love that was at stake. He was faithful to the end. He calls us to follow in His footsteps and to do so by faith, remembering what Paul would say in 1 Corinthians 15.

**1 Corinthians 15:58** …be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

It is not in vain. Every single thing is worth it. It all has meaning. So He calls us to not settle back. For sure, there are challenges that happen in life. Sometimes there are some people, and we talk together. You come to Bethany and maybe you find this is a good place to heal because I’ve been hurt really bad. You’re coming and you’re taking some time to rest and there is a blessing. It’s a joy to see people heal and it’s healthy. But there is a time when all of a sudden, you start to get pretty comfortable on the bench. You come off the court and you start to think, this is kind of nice and these warmups are kind of nice. I probably need to ice up a bit and stretch up a bit. In fact, I might go back to the locker room a bit. I’m just going to watch on the tv. I’m going to take a little nap. Actually, I might just head home.” There is a danger of waiting too long to serve.

Paul is saying, hang in there. God can give you the love and the strength to have zeal and to be fervent because you’re going to do it not for people, but for Him. There are going to be tough times. In the new community here with those Christians in Rome, in our own community, it’s going to be messy. Look at any church in the New Testament. It’s going to be messy. But we can thrive actually as a biblical community even in the midst of the mess because we’ve been shown the way by Jesus and given the Spirit of Jesus. It will happen through love. It’s not love that is superficial, but love that is supernatural. It transcends our obvious limitations and reminds us of God because that’s exactly who it comes from. So it’s love that stands out in all kinds of ways, but perhaps most simply because it’s true.