

## Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17

### Prayer and Announcements

### Worship

### Praise Report Time

### Worship

### Slide Welcome

#### Greeting & Greeting Time

How I wish I wasn't standing here this morning. I wish I was sitting in my usual place, and Pastor Brian was up here bringing us encouragement from God in the power of His Spirit as he has obviously been called to do by God Himself. I wish the beautiful Ms. Shannon was here with us or in the back rooms ministering to our children. I wish Brady was working his magic back in the corner. I wish my dearly beloved sisters and brothers of the Hopkins family were not laboring under this overwhelming grief. I hope fervently and trust faithfully that soon all of us will be together here again to worship God together in spirit and in truth. I know in the depth of my heart that this ministry is God's irresistible call upon my beloved brother Brian, and I trust together with you all that God will soon restore the Hopkins family to their rightful place among us.

But of course, everything has changed in the blink of an eye and will never again be quite as it was even after God has worked His miraculous healing in our hearts. We know and trust that Nevan Hopkins being absent from the body is now present with the Lord. As believers, God assures us that we too will one day be ushered like Nevan into His glorious presence. But in the meantime, the ache of Nevan's sudden absence from our midst is ever present in our hearts and will remain throughout our earthly life.

I have long dreaded hearing the ring of a phone or a knock on the door like the one that came to the Hopkins family last Tuesday morning. I can only imagine the tremendous shock and sudden flood of desperate grief that inundated their hearts and their home in that moment. We who have come to love them so deeply have the God-given privilege of sharing in their sorrow and ministering to them in our own ways through it. Yet we can never truly put ourselves into their shoes. Their journey through life is their own. We journey together, but always on our own separate paths. But it will not always be that way.

Our deep and abiding hope is in the promise of true unity with God and with each other that Jesus made as He prayed to His Father for us in the Garden of Gethsemane just hours before He laid down His own life to restore us into eternal fellowship with God.

#### Slide – John 17:22-24

***<sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. <sup>24</sup>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. John 17:22-***

***24 (ESV)***

### Little Comfort Where I Thought to Find It

Of course, God's Word contains many passages of encouragement to help us in our times of grief and sorrow. As I was trying to prepare for this message after learning of Nevan's sudden death, it seemed to me I should share some of those. But I have to be honest. I can't bring myself to say with Job "***blessed be the Name of the Lord***" (Job 1:20) just now. Please don't misunderstand me. Most certainly, the Name of the Lord is ever to be praised and honored. After all, He gave His own life willingly and joyfully to rescue us out of the curse of death brought into the world by our sin. I get that. I most assuredly get that, and I do love the Lord my God with all my heart. But if the truth be told, rather than blessing God's Name right now, I am deeply angry with God for allowing this tragedy to strike my brother and his family so suddenly and shockingly. I do know in the depths of my heart that God is sovereign and righteous and true and just and graceful and merciful and loving in all things, but I'm just not seeing the blessing or the righteousness or the mercy or the grace in this event quite yet. So, I'm not quite ready to join with Job in agreement – not yet.

Nor do I find much comfort in David's wisdom when he said, "***I shall go to him, but he will not return to me,***" upon learning of the death of his infant son. (2 Samuel 12:23) Yes, I know and believe what Jesus proclaimed to the people gathered beside the Sea of Galilee to hear from Him.

### Slide – John 6:40

***40For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*** John 6:40 (ESV)

As a Gospel believer and Christ follower, I trust in His promise of eternal life for all who look upon Him and believe in Him just as Nevan did, and many of us gathered here do. Yet the resurrection He has promised us on "***...the last day***" is of little comfort in our grief here today – at least not to me.

I do certainly acknowledge as Solomon did in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 that God has ordained the proper time for all things – even death and war. I agree completely with what Peter said in response to those who are impatient for the Lord's promised return.

### Slide – 2 Peter 3:9

***9The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*** 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

Yet I continue to grieve, and I'm even angry with God that the wicked seemingly continue to prosper, while promising young lives like Nevan's are suddenly ended. I know and trust that God has a purpose in all things – even Nevan's sudden tragic death. Without doubt God uses these things in His work of perfecting us into the image of His Son, as Paul wrote to the church at Corinth.

### Slides – 2 Corinthians 4:17

***17For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*** 2 Corinthians 4:17-17 (NKJV)

## Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17

Even so – That will be then. This is now! How do we press forward **here and now** under the weight of this overwhelming grief?

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### Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17

The answer to that question I think is surprisingly simple. We must continue in love for one another and for the lost and dying all around us just as Jesus commanded on the night He was betrayed.

### Slide – John 13:34

***34A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*** John 13:34 (ESV)

But what exactly should our love for one another look like? Paul gives us some concise instructions. Let's read them together and then take a closer look at them.

### Slides – Romans 12:9-17

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

***12Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.***

***13Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.***

***14Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.*** Romans 12:9-17 (ESV)

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### Slide – Romans 12:9

***9Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*** Romans 12:9 (ESV)

There is a distinct line between loving someone for who they are – brothers and sisters in Christ – and tolerating or even encouraging bad behavior. Many of you have heard me tell the story about my dear brother in Christ who had the courage to tell me one day a few months after I got saved, “Brian, I know you love the Lord, but I have to tell you that your foul mouth is destroying your Gospel witness.” One very difficult aspect of the love we show to our fellow Christ followers is pointing out each other's errors like my friend did with me. This is the first step in the formula for so-called “church discipline” that Jesus outlined for us.

## Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17

### Slides – Matthew 18:15-17

***15“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV)***

At first glance, this may seem harsh and distinctly unloving. But if we truly love someone, we will not allow them to continue along a path that we know would lead them into trouble or even death. For example, if we know God declares in His Word that homosexual behavior is an abomination and that those who engage in such behavior will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven, our society (and even some of our so-called “christian” churches) have rules forbidding us to say so. It’s now called “hate speech,” and it is illegal in many jurisdictions. But in fact – as Jesus teaches us here in Matthew 18:15-17 – pointing out our brother’s or sister’s error is an act of purest love and care for their wellbeing – not hate. It takes courage and devotion to serve our fellow travelers in this way as my dear brother did for me.

**BTW** – I looked, but I couldn’t find anywhere in the Bible that said anything about leaving anonymous complaints on people’s voicemails or asking the pastor to talk to someone without mentioning your name. Okay. I confess. I didn’t really look for that. I just assumed God didn’t say anything about such shenanigans in His Holy Word.

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### Slide – Romans 12:10

***10Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Romans 12:10 (ESV)***

We don’t always get along perfectly with our brothers and sisters in our earthly families. There is plenty of strife and rivalry among the kids that hurts our parents deeply. So it is within our Church families, too. Such dissention deeply grieves God – so much so that He even says He hates it.

### Slide – Proverbs 6:16-19

***16There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: 17haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, 19a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. Proverbs 6:16-19 (ESV)***

## Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17

But when push comes to shove, families must always fall together to encourage and defend one another. Most of my earthly brothers and sisters are unbelievers who fully embrace much of the debauchery in our society. Without doubt we have strongly opposed world views. But each of us would take a bullet for any of the others without a moment's hesitation. So it must be with our Church family. Here on Earth we are continually beset with spiritual attack by our great enemy against ourselves and our fellow Christians. We must strive together in brotherly affection to resist the devil's advances so that in the evil day we might stand. As Benjamin Franklin famously said, "**We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.**"

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### Slide – Romans 12:11

***11Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*** Romans 12:11  
(ESV)

Our love for our fellow Christians must be genuine and robust – demonstrated in the depths of our hearts and by our actions, not just by our words. So must we demonstrate our love for the Lord. How do we show our love for God? Jesus put it very simply.

***15“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*** John 14:15 (ESV)

Of course, one of those commandments is the one He gave us just before He ascended back to His Father – to go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that He has commanded us (Matthew 28:18-20). Our love for our Lord must be readily apparent to all who see the joy and enthusiasm in which we serve Him.

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### Slide – Romans 12:12

***12Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*** Romans 12:12  
(ESV)

We have the blessed hope of resurrection into eternal heavenly worship of our God who loves us so much that He gave His own life to rescue us out of the death that we ourselves brought into His perfect creation through our willful sin. Yet despite the joy of that abiding hope, we know that our Christian lives here on earth are fraught with troubles like the horrible tragedy that has suddenly confronted the Hopkins family. As Job said,

***1Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.*** Job 14:1 (ESV)

Therefore, Paul tells us here in Romans 12:12 that we must be in continual prayerful communion with that same God who gave His life for us, knowing "***God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.***" (Psalm 46:1)

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## Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17

### Slide – Romans 12:13

***13Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*** Romans 12:9-13 (ESV)

Giving is one area in which even the modern, largely-apostate Church continues to excel – at least in terms of monetary giving. Christians – particularly Evangelicals – are noted for their generosity in giving our money to serve the needs of others. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent worldwide economic downturn has heavily impacted charitable giving in general. Giving by Christians is also down from its pre-pandemic peak, but nevertheless Christians continue to shine in this area.

But monetary donations are only one aspect of what Paul means in encouraging us to “***contribute to the needs of the saints.***” While we continue faithfully in giving our money, we are less willing to give up our time and labor. This isn’t very surprising. Most of us are on the run from the time we wake up until we fall exhausted into our beds after a long busy day. The pace of our society is increasingly frantic. But the fact is that many of our brothers and sisters are not in financial need. Instead, they are lonely. Their biggest need is just to have some company even for just a few minutes of meaningful conversation now and again. Some folks just need transportation because they either don’t have the means or can’t drive themselves. Filling that need takes time out of our busy lives. This is an area of showing love to our fellow Christians in which most of us could do better. If I sit down and take inventory of the manner in which I spend my time, day-by-day, I quickly find that I’m simply throwing many of those precious minutes away playing silly games on my phone or just vegging out watching videos.

Giving of our labor is another area in which we should do better. Most church pastors would count themselves blessed if 10% of their flocks showed up to pitch in on a church work day or mission outreach. This shouldn’t surprise us either. Christian congregations throughout the world are aging themselves out of existence. The older members are steadily dying off, and their not being fully replaced by younger members coming up. Those of us who are of a “certain” age can avow and attest that we’re just not capable of doing many of the things we used to be able to do. When we went to work on our Carpenters for Christ project this year, I found myself having to take a lot more breaks just to catch my breath and take the load off my bones than I did even just last year. Nevertheless, we all need to commit ourselves to doing what we can even if that’s just holding a tape measure or pointing a flashlight.

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### Slide – Romans 12:14

***14Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*** Romans 12:14 (ESV)

This one is hard. It runs contrary to our nature. Most of us at least subconsciously think the Golden Rule should read, “Do one to others before they do one to you.” When people try to hurt us, we instinctively lash back or try to get our own licks in before they have a chance. But Jesus calls us to rise above our fleshly nature and demonstrate His love instead – even to those whom we believe are least deserving due to their own unloving words and actions. Jesus taught that we must “***Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.***” But He didn’t just say so. He showed us by

## Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17

example when He prayed, “*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,*” even as He was being crucified!

But what about when those who persecute us are our own brothers and sisters in Christ? It breaks my heart to have to say this, but we do and say hurtful and harmful things to each other **right here in this very sanctuary!** Look around the room and remember some of those who once joined with us to worship here but no longer do. Some (not all) of them stopped coming here to be with us because of something that was done or said to them by their own fellow Christians **right here!** Shame on us! Our enemies and those who persecute us should **never** be those of our own church family! Yet sometimes they are, and Jesus still calls for us to love them and pray for them.

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### Slide – Romans 12:15

*<sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* Romans 12:15 (ESV)

This one seems straightforward. But we tend to overcomplicate even this. When we are overjoyed with something that has happened, we want to share our joy with others. If we truly love someone who is rejoicing, we too will rejoice simply because it gives us joy to witness their joy. That’s simple. It’s childlike. Furthermore, it’s Christlike. Why then do we so often allow petty jealousy into our hearts ruining their happiness when we are suffering under our own sorrows and difficulties? Why do we covet their joy for ourselves rather than simply partaking in it? Such petty selfishness doesn’t reflect genuine love – quite the opposite.

Comforting those who grieve should also be quite natural and simple, but too often we overcomplicate that as well. Those who are in sorrow need our compassion and willingness to come alongside them to help them shoulder the burden of grief. In such times we need someone to simply offer an ear to listen, a hand to hold, a shoulder to cry on, and even sometimes a chest to beat on. These are easy for us to give them if we truly want to show them our love.

Most often though, they don’t need or want our advice or our platitudes. They most certainly don’t need our judgment and chastisement even when they already know they caused the circumstances of their sorrow themselves. As fellow believers they most certainly already know any “words of wisdom” we might be tempted to offer. It’s much more beneficial for our loved ones to simply do what we seem to find so difficult in such circumstances – keeping our mouths shut except to quietly offer them those other tokens of our love that they truly need in their distress.

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### Slide – Romans 12:16

*<sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.* Romans 12:16 (ESV)

God’s Word is full of admonition against pride. Recall that it was Lucifer’s own pride that caused his fall from Heaven.

## Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17

### Slides – Isaiah 14:12-14

*<sup>12</sup>“How you are fallen from heaven,  
O Lucifer, son of the morning!  
How you are cut down to the ground,  
You who weakened the nations!  
<sup>13</sup>For you have said in your heart:  
‘I will ascend into heaven,  
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;  
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation  
On the farthest sides of the north;  
<sup>14</sup>I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,  
I will be like the Most High.’* Isaiah 14:12-14 (NKJV)

And it was pride with which the serpent then tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, bringing sin and death into creation.

### Slide – Genesis 3:4-5

*<sup>4</sup>Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup>For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* Genesis 3:4-5 (ESV)

Small wonder then that haughtiness is first on the list of seven abominations that God hates we saw in Proverbs 6:16-19. If we guard ourselves from sinful pride, we will truly be loving ourselves since God plainly warns us that “***Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.***” (Proverbs 16:18).

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### Slide – Romans 12:17

*<sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.* Romans 12:17 (ESV)

We started this morning looking at Jesus’ commandment for us to love one another in John 13:34. But we find one of the important reasons that Jesus gave us that commandment in the very next verse.

### Slide – John 13:35

*<sup>35</sup>By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* John 13:35 (ESV)

All of us day-by-day disobey God’s commandments including Jesus’ commandment for us to love one another. Praise God that by the precious shed blood of Jesus on the cross, we don’t have to face God’s righteous punishment of death for our sins. As Pastor Brian taught us last Sunday, we are “saints saved by grace.” Our disobedience might cause our beloved God great sorrow, but it will not condemn us to Hell.



## **Genuine Love – Romans 12:9-17**

However, when we are seen to be ugly toward our brothers and sisters in Christ or toward those outside the Body, we might very well risk condemning someone *else* to death in *their* sins. Make no mistake. Professing Christians are continually observed by unbelievers to see if we are indeed new creations re-born in the very Spirit of God. The very instant one of us stumbles in a “newsworthy” sin our error is blasted all over the media as another example of Christian hypocrisy. If people don’t see any apparent change in our behavior due to the indwelling of God’s Spirit within us, they very understandably ask themselves whether eternal salvation in Christ is real.

Let me close with the very famous quote from theologian Brennan Manning:

### **Slide – Manning Quote**

***“The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”*** Brennan Manning

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### **Slide – Logo**

### **Invitation**

### **Invitation Music**

### **Prayer & Invocation**