

LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY LIKE OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

JOHN 13:34

Good morning! Happy Father's Day to all our handsome fathers today. You're all good-looking. Me, I'm just looking good.

Being Father's Day, I want to talk about something that we all need to do as fathers. And that is, to love unconditionally like our heavenly Father. Loving without conditions. You see, in our world today, people can love each other but they put limitations or conditions. I will love you if...I will love you but. Loving without conditions means loving without ifs and buts. But how do you that?

It's really hard to do. Because people are hard to love. People are imperfect and because they're imperfect, they can tick you off, they can have an attitude, they can be irritating, they can be upsetting. BTW, we're all included in this. But we need to love unconditionally anyway. God commanded us. And his commands are not there for us to ignore, but to obey. Last week, David gave you a good compelling message about obedience to God. Obedience in the little everyday things that God commands us to do. So, how about loving others unconditionally?

Fathers, beings the head of the family, we should set the example. It means showing love and affection to the members of the family especially to your wives. Do I hear an amen? When you love your wives, your children notice that and they themselves will copy that. They will love their moms and they will love their spouse when the time comes and they will love others outside of the family circle as well.

So, today I've entitled this message **"Loving Unconditionally Like Our Heavenly Father"**. This message, btw, is unconditional. Meaning, I'm not limiting it to 3 points as I normally do. So, you just follow along and count the ways you

can love unconditionally. Also, this message is not limited to the fathers only. This message will apply to anyone who is listening. This message is unconditional.

Today we're going to look at a passage of scripture where Jesus gives his disciples a new command. What's so special about this new command is the lack of conditions he places on it, because he's raising the bar. Please turn to your Bibles and open to John chapter 13.

Let me just briefly set the scene here. Jesus is at the Last Supper with his disciples. He knows that this is the last conversation he's going to have with them before his death, so he's not talking about the weather. He's not talking about the latest sport scores or the best place for takeout. He knows that this is the final conversation, so he's telling them the most important things that he wants them to know. He's setting them up for the mission, reemphasizing things that he's taught them before. This is a jam-packed conversation.

During this conversation he gets to this point here in John 13:34. He says this: *"So now I am giving you a new commandment."* That's a pretty big deal, a new commandment, so their ears are perking up, and he says this: *"Love each other."* I imagine for a moment they're like, what's new about that? This is what's new. *"Just as I have loved you, you should love each other."* Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. What Jesus does in this conversation is he raises the bar for his expectation of love.

You see, we always want to know what the conditions are. When we think about how we're supposed to treat each other, if we go back further in time, back before God inspired Moses to write the first five books of the Bible in about 1800 BC, we have records of the earliest agreements for how we're supposed to treat each other.

We read in Hammurabi's Code, that it says, "Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth," that if someone pokes out your eye, you poke out their eye. If someone

knocks out your tooth, knock out their tooth. If someone chops off your ear, chop off their ear, which I'm not sure what's with all the eye poking back then, but apparently it was a problem, they had to record this down. Essentially what it's saying is that what people do to you, you do to them.

Now we fast forward a few hundred years, and God is using Moses to lead his people out of captivity, out of slavery in Egypt, to the land that he's promised them. He's created this great nation, and through this nation the whole world is going to be blessed. He's sending the savior of the world, the Messiah. But in this process of setting them apart from their neighbors and this idea of do to others as they do to you, God raises the standard.

In Leviticus he gives the instruction, "Love your neighbor as yourself." So instead of doing to people as they do to you, now treat people the way that you want to be treated. The way you expect people to treat you, that's how you should treat others. He raises the bar, so they're standing out against the culture around them. It's radically different. They're called to a higher level of love.

Now, if you fast forward another 1,500 years or so, we see in the ministry of Jesus where they're living under this command: love your neighbor as yourself. But one of the big debates and one of the religious leaders asks Jesus this one day, he's like, "Jesus, I understand love your neighbor as yourself, but who's my neighbor?" What he wants to know is what are the limits to this love? Is my neighbor just like people geographically in my neighborhood? Is it people in my family, people in my tribe, in my community, my ethnicity? How far does my love have to go?

Jesus gives this amazing story about this man that is beaten up on the side of the road and all different types of people pass him by, but the one that stops is the one that's from a different culture, from a different belief set, that has no reason to help him out, no connection with this person other than that he crosses all these barriers and loves him and cares for him, and Jesus says that guy is a good

neighbor. So what Jesus says is love everyone. Your neighbor is everyone. Love everyone as you love yourself.

But now here, just a few years later, Jesus is at the Last Supper. He says, "I want you to love as I have loved you." So now our measure of love is not what we expect, but what God has shown. You see, Jesus modeled love without conditions. Jesus loved unconditionally. We just look through the examples of how Jesus did ministry and interacted with people, it's filled with examples of unconditional love.

But just this night, I mean a few moments before this, Jesus started off their meal by washing all of the disciples' feet. Now one of these disciples, Judas, he knew going into this meal that he had betrayed him, that Jesus knew that he had met with the religious leaders, that he had agreed on a price to turn Jesus over to them. He knew that he had been betrayed, yet he still washed his feet. I don't know about you, but I'd have a hard time doing that. I mean I might, but I'd use a steel wool or something with spikes, like just give him a little extra there. But Jesus didn't -- even though he was betrayed, he still showed him love.

Jesus had this amazing conversation with a woman one day at a well, a woman from a different ethnicity, a different belief system, a different moral compass. Everything about her is different, but he didn't let any of those things be a divide to him sitting down and having compassion and having that conversation. He loved without conditions.

There is even this incredible example of when Jesus gets word that John the Baptist has died, he's been killed by Herod, and as John's disciples come and give Jesus this news. And Jesus is related to John, it's his cousin, so he's grieving, and he says, "Let's get away for a while. I need to go be by myself." So he gets in this boat and they go across the sea, and when they arrive on the other side there's like thousands of people waiting for him.

He doesn't say, "Hey, guys, can you give me a minute? I just need some me time. Let me tell you what happened. Let me tell you what I'm going through." No, he has compassion on the crowds, and he taught them and he healed them. He spent the whole day with them, and at the end of the day he takes five loaves and two fish and does this amazing miracle for all of them. Jesus didn't let even how he was feeling be a limit to his love. **Jesus demonstrated what unconditional love looks like. He modeled it for us, so we're called to go and do the same.**

What I want to talk about today is what are the barriers that we place, the limits to our love? I want to create just a little bit of an experience here for us to walk through. We're going to read through a passage of scripture that's found in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. It's a letter that the apostle Paul wrote, and in it he's describing what love is like.

The reason why this is important is because we want to get specific. If we keep it general, if we just say okay, I'm just going to love unconditionally, it's hard to get to our limits. But if we take it down another level, I think we can start wrestling with some of these conditions we place on our love. Even if you've never been to church before you might be familiar with this passage, because it's read at pretty much most weddings, 1 Corinthians 13, and, in fact, because it's read so often at weddings we think that it's kind of like a wedding passage, but it's not just a wedding passage. It's about love, about how we live out what this unconditional love looks like.

So I'm going to read through it once and then we're going to go through it a little bit more slowly and reflect on it. It says this. I'm reading from the New Living Translation: ***"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It's not irritable. It keeps no records of being wrong. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever***

the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance."

Now, I think the first thing that you might notice about this passage is there's no asterisks on any of these words. There's no terms and conditions. We don't find fine print reading after it, limiting any of these things. When it comes to unconditional love, **unconditional love means removing the asterisk that we place on love and replacing it with a period**, to be able to say to someone, "I love you, period."

What I want to do is I want to go back through these words, and as I say each word, I want you to just have a moment of a little bit of self-reflection. Ask yourself, What are the conditions that I place on this? How do I limit my love in these areas? And I need your cooperation here. we're going to recite a few things. I'm going to start at the very beginning.

It says this, **"Love is patient."** Love is patient. I'm patient. I'm patient as long as you don't ask me the same question over and over again. Parents, can you relate to that? I'm patient as long as the kids don't run around house making noise. I'm patient as long as the driver in front of me is driving fast like me. I'm patient if the grocery line is moving fast. What should it be? I'm patient. Period. Say it with me. **I'm patient, period.**

Love is kind. I'm kind, as long as you don't disrespect me. I'm kind, but you better not bring my family into it. I'm kind if you're kind to me. No, I'm kind, period. Say it with me. **I'm kind. Period.**

Next is: "Love is not jealous." I'm not jealous. **I'm understanding.** I wish goodwill to others. I'm okay with that person getting the promotion. I'm fine with it, as long as they've worked hard, as long as they deserved it, as long as they don't get recognition. I'm not jealous as long as you don't get more likes on Facebook than I do. Say it with me. **I'm understanding. Period.**

Love is not proud or boastful. **It's humble.** I'm not good at humility, I'm great at it. Just kidding. I'm not boastful...as long as you recognize how talented I am. I'm not proud if you realize that my car is sleek and shiny. Say it with me. **I'm humble, period.**

Love is not rude. **It's courteous** and polite. It's courteous unless they start something with me. It's polite until they tell me my hair is gray. It's not. **I'm courteous, period.**

Love does not demand its own way. **It's easygoing.** It's tolerant. I don't demand my own way except when I'm right. I'm easygoing but you have to go with my best idea. I don't demand my own way. I'm easygoing, as long as we're hitting the metrics, as long as the goals are being met. But say it with me. **I'm easygoing, period.**

Love is not irritable, **so it's friendly** or amiable, just don't talk too loud. Or too much. I'm friendly if you don't criticize me. Say it to the person next to you. **I'm friendly, period.**

Love keeps no record of being wrong, which means **love is forgiving.** Forgiving. And, of course, you're forgiving, as long as they ask for forgiveness, as long as they're willing to admit that they were wrong. As long as they have an intention of changing their behavior in the future, yeah, I'm forgiving. No, love is forgiving, period. **Say it with me, I'm forgiving, period.**

Love does not rejoice about injustice, but rejoices whenever the truth wins out, so **love is compassionate.** I'm totally compassionate. I don't like to see people fail. I don't like to see people hurting, unless they deserve it, unless they're kind of reaping what they sow. No, love is compassionate, period. Say it with me, **I'm compassionate, period.**

Folks, the bottom line is **love is unconditional.** It's unconditional, period. Why? Because that's the way that Jesus loved us, and he's telling us to love in that

same way. If you're wondering why this is so important, why this is such a big deal, let me read the rest of the passage from John. "Jesus says, 'This new command I'm giving to you, love one another as I have loved you.'" and then he says this, *"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."* What Jesus is saying is, "The extent to which you are willing to love in this way is the extent to which the world will see me in you, that they will identify you as my followers."

I like to think about it as like a uniform. If someone wears a uniform, it's easy to identify what group they're a part of. If someone was here wearing fatigues today, you'd be like, "Oh, yeah, they're in the military." It's easy to make that connection. If someone is wearing a police uniform or a firefighter's outfit uniform, it would be, "Yeah, policeman, firefighter." Their uniform identifies what they're a part of. If someone were to walk in today with a baseball uniform, it would be kind of weird, but we would know that they're a baseball player, right? You're identified by the uniform that you're wearing.

What Jesus is saying here is that when you love in this way it's like you're putting on the uniform of Jesus, that you're identified with him by this type of love, this unconditional love. Why? Because God is love. God exists, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, in this relationship of love. That Jesus came down here -- God sent his son because of his love for us. Love is front and center. I think sometimes we think love is like this simple thing, it's this simplistic -- it's kind of easy to do thing because we've heard about it for so long.

So *what's your next step* today? Here's what I'm telling you it's not. It's not okay to go do all of those things on the *screen* unconditionally. That's a little overwhelming. I would encourage you to do this. Concentrate on one area that you're going to start with. As we were reading through that list what's one of those areas that in your mind, like I've got a lot of asterisks on that one? I've got a lot of

terms and conditions in that area, in kindness. As a father, I need to work on my patience, that's the one I'm going to focus in at this period of time.

Here's what I'd like you to do. Just reflect on it this week. And reflect about yourself. Not about another person who you think needs it. You start on yourself. Let me give you one word of warning about this though. This is not about just trying harder. This is not just about saying okay, if I'm really disciplined, if I've really gut this out, if I really exercise some self-control, if I really just try to be more patient or compassionate, then I will improve in this area.

If that's kind of your mindset leaving today, you'll probably make some improvements. Just by sheer willpower you might be able to remove a couple of those terms and conditions and do better in that area for a while, but the type of transformation that we're talking about is not naturally possible. It's impossible for us to do, but it's only through God's power that it's possible.

I just want to read one more verse here. It's from the book of Titus, Titus chapter 3. It says this: *"When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit."* I want you to notice the Holy Spirit there.

You see, it's the Holy Spirit that develops this new life in us. In fact, in Galatians it talks about that the Holy Spirit who produces fruit in our lives, and one of those is love. The Holy Spirit will produce this type of love in our life, so we have to work in cooperation with God, which means this isn't just an exercise in willpower or trying harder or turning over a new leaf. Whatever it is you need working on, it begins with cooperation with God. And it begins with prayer. God help me to be more patient. God help me to be compassionate without conditions.

Now, that's a little bit of a dangerous prayer though. As they say, "Be careful what you pray for." But that's a good prayer. Because if you ever pray for patience

before what is God going to send your way? Difficult situations, right? If you're working on kindness, guess what's about to show up in your life. A bunch of irritating people. They're going to test you on that, but that's how we grow.

When I walked here in front is there anyone who thought, "I bet that Pastor Rolly lifts weights. He seems to be a pretty buff guy." I don't, obviously, because I don't like lifting those heavy weights. But the only way I'm going to get muscles is if I work against resistance, if I put in the effort, if I strain and put my muscles working hard against something. But I think it's too late for that.

But nothing is too late when it comes to working out our spiritual muscles. The only way that God is going to develop these things in your life, it's probably not going to be just some supernatural, boom, you become more patient. The only way you develop these things in your life is that God is going to lead you and put you in situations, the Holy Spirit is going to guide and empower and direct you to be patient in very difficult situations, to be kind to unkind people, to be compassionate to people who really deserve what they're getting but you're having to show love in that situation. He's going to stretch those muscles, so it's through his power, it's through the Holy Spirit working in us that we're able to work in those ways.

Then one other thing that I'd ask you, share it with someone. Who's someone in your life that you trust to say, "Hey, this is what I'm praying for. This is what I'm working on. Would you walk alongside me?" Maybe it's your spouse. Maybe it's a friend. Just say, "Would you hold me accountable in this area?"

Let's go back to this passage again. It says this: "When God, our savior, revealed his kindness and love," so God, who is love, revealed his kindness and love. How did he do that? He saved us. He saved us. We need to be saved from our rebellion against him, the Bible calls it sin, missing the mark, when we do things that hurt ourself, hurt others, when we make poor decisions, the sin separates us

from God, but God saves us from that sin, "not because of the righteous things that we have done," not because he has this list of terms and conditions that we have to meet, "but because of his mercy," mercy is not getting what we deserve. Our rebellion deserves separation from God forever, "but in his mercy he saved us. He washed away our sins," it's our sin that separates us from God, "giving us new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit."

Maybe you came here today thinking that the possibility of a relationship with God is this process, this process of filling these terms and conditions, but what I'm telling you today is that God has given you the gift of forgiveness, the gift of a relationship with him. He's offering you his mercy, eternal life, if you would just believe, if you would just accept that gift that he's offering, that unconditional love. It's not something you have to go figure out. You can make that decision right here and now.

As we wrap up, I want to invite everyone just to close your eyes and bow your heads for a moment. I just want to create just a little bubble of quiet space around you for you to contemplate what your next step is. Maybe it's that item that you decided to work on, but maybe it's to stop trying to earn God's love and receive it, to not try to earn God's forgiveness but to accept it. You can do that by having a conversation with him right now.

You might just pray something like this. If you're lost for words, you might just pray a prayer like this. God, thank you for loving me. God, I'm coming to you today because I recognize my need for your forgiveness. I've made poor choices in life. I've done things that have hurt myself, that have hurt others. I've rebelled against you. I've lived my life my own way and I recognize my need for forgiveness, and I thank you for paying for my forgiveness on the cross.

I accept that today and I'm choosing to follow you. I invite your Holy Spirit to come inside me, to produce all of this good love in my life and help me to love

as you have loved me, and from this point forward, God, I'm choosing to follow you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.