

UNRELENTING LOVE

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ISBN: 9781694089168

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the love of my life who has been my greatest support with never-ending encouragement and grace in all we pursue together. I love you, Charity.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There aren't enough words to thank all the influential people who I've been blessed and gifted with in my life. First and foremost, I owe all to Jesus. Without my relationship with Jesus, I could not be who I am today.

To my wife, Charity. She helped me understand what true love, sacrifice, character and integrity look like. She is my greatest supporter and encourager in life, and I couldn't have ever come close to doing life with anyone better.

To my parents, Scott and Laurie. Thank you for always loving and supporting me. You've always encouraged my pursuit of Jesus and have held fast to that conviction to this day. Dad, you've taught me what it means to be a man of integrity and grace. Mom, you've been a steadfast reminder of a mother's love and a constant support in my life. To my big brother, Andrew. Thank you for teaching me to always search out the best in people and to believe in the ideas and dreams that God has put inside me. To my little sister, Mekenzie. I love you more than you can know. I cherish you and love seeing the woman you have become and continue to grow into. I so admire your drive and determination in life as it challenges me to do the same.

To my pastors and spiritual parents, Jim and Deborah. Words can't express how thankful I am to have you in my life.

You've challenged me to reach and dream big. You've been a gleaming example of character and integrity and have always believed in me and the gifts God has put inside me.

To Mark and Desiree. Thank you for always being there through so many ups and downs and constantly being a voice of strength and life. Your friendship to Charity and me is such a gift.

To William and Mercedes. You don't always have the opportunity to work with your best friends, but Charity and I get that opportunity with the both of you. Thank you for being such an example of strength and excellence in our lives as we strive for more and more.

To Chris and Mona. Your friendship, accountability, and the way you live your lives have made all the difference in my own life. The friendship we share is a constant, and you are both a reminder of loyalty and steadfast support in our lives.

To David and Travis. A lot of time goes by before we see each other again, but when we are together it's like no time has passed. Your words still echo in my life. The crazy stories we have from our earlier days will be legendary.

To my Liberty Church family. Words can't express how thankful I am for all of you. Your support, grace, and belief in the gifts of God in my life mean so much. I love pastoring at Liberty Church and count it as such a blessing to serve such a

generous and loving church.

To the Underground School of Ministry alumni. We've always stated, "Once family, always family." This always rings true as I count my years as your director as some of the most rewarding days of my life. I love you all.

1 - UNRELENTING LOVE

The thing I love about Jesus is, he hasn't gone anywhere. He was there at the beginning, and He's here now. That's unrelenting love. That's the kind of love that doesn't stop, doesn't yield, but keeps on fighting, keeps on going. God's love is so powerful, more powerful than we can ever even understand. It's unrelenting because it doesn't let up; it doesn't weaken in strength or pace. God's love is unrelenting, that is the love of God.

1 John 4:8-10 says:

"My beloved friends let's continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God because God is love, so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us, God sent his only son into the world, so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about, not that we once upon a time loved God, that he loved us, sent his son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins, and the damage they've done to our relationship with God." (The Message Bible)

When I was a kid all I wanted to be was Batman. He was my favorite superhero, and I looked up to him. I thought he was the best of all superheroes. One day when my childhood friend and I were playing Batman in his backyard. I imagined what it would be like to be Batman. I remember looking up and seeing a clothesline pole in the shape of a "T." It was maybe five or six feet high with small knobs a child my size could use as a ladder.

I just knew this was a sign I was destined to be Batman. I climbed up to the top of the clothesline and perched myself like a bird (more like a bat *wink-wink*). I got ready to make a jump. It seemed like a perfectly good idea at the time. Only two to four feet away was his parents' shed. I was sure I could jump from the pole to the roof of this shed. We all know that some of the best conversations and some of the most important moments in Batman's life happened on a rooftop, right? Just think of all the superheroes, specifically Batman. There he is, in the middle of the night, the bat signal goes up, and where does he meet Commissioner Gordon? The rooftop, of course. When it comes to Batman's story, all cool things happen on rooftops. Before I jumped, I asked myself once more, "Is this a good idea?"

"Of course," my 6-year-old mind answered, "this is absolutely the best idea you've ever had in your life." So, I jumped. I felt like I was jumping in slow motion. I was in midair when I remembered that I had to land on this roof. I had no idea if it was secure or strong in any way. I landed on the roof, only

to find that it was not a sturdy metal roof. I proceeded not only to land on top of the shed, but I went through it. And of course, just like a Looney Tunes cartoon, my feet were dangling inside while my upper body was stuck. Yeah that's right. I was stuck on the outside of the shed. My arms were the only things that were keeping me from falling.

Another time a childhood friend of mine and I were playing superheroes. He pretended to be Superman, and I, of course, was Batman. I used a yo-yo as a grappling hook and threw it up onto the curtain rod hoping to climb up the wall. Once again, it seemed like a good idea at the time. However, I discovered that rod wasn't strong enough to hold me. So I pulled the yo-yo off the curtain rod. Of course, it flew off, the curtain rod fell, and the yo-yo hit me square in the forehead.

It's moments like these that we realize maybe we're not quite equipped to be who we would like to be. We aren't always equipped with the right resources either. Sometimes if you don't have the right experience, you're not able to be who you want to be.

As determined as I was, I would never be able to be Batman, even with the resources I had available to me at that moment. I wasn't a billionaire. I didn't have all the cool gadgets or the coveted utility belt. I wasn't trained in martial arts. I didn't even have my driver's license, so I couldn't drive the Batmobile. My point is this:

When we try to do something without the TRUTH of how to do it or the RESOURCES in which to do it, it doesn't have the impact we had hoped it would.

Have you ever tried to do something nice for someone only to have it fall flat? You dreamed of this grandiose idea of how you were going to do it, but along the way you lacked the necessary resources. You ran out of time, and it just wasn't as powerful as you had once envisioned it could be. You still did something nice for that person; it was just on a smaller scale.

Our capacity to love and be loved is directly related to our limited life experiences, beliefs, faith, and knowledge.

God, however, loves perfectly. He has always loved perfectly because He's a perfect God. 1 John 4:8-10 says, "God is love." Wow, what a powerful statement! He is love. We, however, have to learn to love. Love was created by Him. Romans 5:8 tells us that He demonstrated that love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. When God creates a way to show you and I love, He follows through with it in the grandest way possible. In fact, there's proof of this again and again in the Bible. More importantly, it's proven in Jesus' birth, His sacrifice and death on the cross, and in His resurrection. Just think about that. He did all this, even when we had our backs turned against Him.

Going back to 1 John 4:8-10, it says, ***"Not the we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God."*** (*The Message Bible*)

This is a beautiful picture of the fact that God's love wasn't contingent upon us loving Him back, showing Him love, or jumping through hoops for Him. His love was there before the dawn of time. It was

there before the foundations of the earth were formed. His love was there, even when we had our backs turned against Him. What a powerful, powerful concept to try and understand. You know it's easy to love those who love you back, right? It's really easy to love people to whom you feel connected.

To love those who don't love you back is difficult. At times it can even feel impossible, right? We call those EGRs (Extra Grace Required). We wonder if we could ever love those kind of people.

But I love the great example of loving others that we have in God. God knew there was only one way to save us, the ones He loves. God went through with the cross because of His great love for us. He sent Jesus, His only Son, to save us. It wasn't easy, but He knew it was necessary because of His love for us.

In Matthew 26:31-46 we see Jesus right before He was to be crucified asking His heavenly Father if there was any other way He could save humankind. Even though what Jesus was facing felt impossible,

He loved us even then. Jesus loved us every moment of that unthinkable beating that He endured. Jesus loved us every moment of an unimaginable death. Jesus loved us every moment of our lives, even when we turn our backs and deny Him. He loves us even when we don't want anything to do with Him.

That's unrelenting love. It doesn't stop, yield, or decrease in strength. It just keeps on fighting for us. It keeps on going. God's love is so powerful, more powerful than we can ever even understand. It's unrelenting because it doesn't let up or slow its pace. God's love is unrelenting, that is the love of God.

2 - A DARK HOLE

As a kindergartener, I loved recess. Who didn't? It was my chance to run free and get out of the confines of the classroom. I was a very energetic child, and so it was very important for me to be able to do this. I was also learning some other things my parents probably didn't approve of.

I remember seeing an older kid pointing a certain finger, that will remain nameless, directly up into the air while gesturing at another child. I'll give you one guess as to what this kid was doing.

Later that day, I decided if an older kid was doing it, maybe it was something cool to do. So, I made the same gesture to a girl sitting directly across from me. She was a friend of mine. She looked at me in shock as she gasped while covering her mouth with her hands. In that moment, I realized I had done something wrong, but I didn't know exactly what. She got up from her chair, walked over to my teacher and whispered something in her ear. My teacher looked at me in shock and asked me to come over to her. She told me I shouldn't do that anymore and that my parents would explain why when I got home.

I'll never forget the feeling I had as my parents explained to me what I had done to one of my friends from school. I was mortified. I felt so much guilt and shame. I walked into my classroom the next day thinking it could never go back to the way it was before. I spent the whole night before thinking about what I had done and how horrible it was. The shame and guilt I felt made me feel like I had done the worst thing possible and that I committed the

deepest, darkest sin. I was sure none of my friends would ever talk to me again.

These were pretty deep thoughts for a kindergartner. But let's be honest, we've all been there. That next day I sat in the corner of the classroom thinking no one wanted to talk to me or be around me.

The girl I had flipped off the day before, (yeah, if you haven't figured it out by now, that's what I did) asked me if I wanted to play blocks with her and the other kids. I was shocked. She acted like nothing had ever happened. I quickly said "yes" and apologized. She gave an even quicker shrug to let me know she had already forgotten about it.

That's a perfect picture of what sin does in our lives if we allow it to. Whether we know we're doing something wrong or not, the guilt and the shame can eat us alive. Adam, the first man ever created, did the exact same thing I did when I was a scrawny little kindergartner. Ashamed at what he had done, Adam thought God wanted nothing else to do with him. Genesis 3:10 says,

"And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.'" (ESV)

Adam hid himself from God because he was afraid of what God was going to do to him. Adam knew he had messed up, and he ran from the very one Who could help him.

It's interesting that nearly 30 years later, it's still easy for me to have the same exact reaction I did back when I was in kindergarten. If I messed up, I'd feel horrible about it and alienate myself from God and others feeling sorry for myself. Finally, I'd eventually realize that I was allowing my guilt to turn into shame, and I would run to the feet of Jesus, only to hear those words once more, "You are forgiven." God erases my sin like it never even happened, gets me back up and moving in the right direction.

Sound familiar? We all struggle with this cycle of sin, guilt and shame because, the devil is a liar. Satan uses shame to alienate us from God. He pulls us further away from the plan God has for us.

Conviction of our sins should lead us to repentance. Conviction means we are allowing God to **expose** our sins. When we're in the presence of God, we should allow Him to do this. We need to let Him show us what we need to change. Just like that little kindergartner who didn't know any better, sometimes we sin without realizing it. But the light of God always helps us see our sin whether intentional or not.

Repentance means to “change your mind.”¹ I like to think of it as turning the opposite direction I was going before, which was toward my sin. When I repent, I am changing directions and moving toward God and away from my sin..

The problem is too often we add more to that definition of repentance. We make it more complicated than it really is. We say things like, "I have to read my Bible for one month straight before I can move on with what God has for me.

¹ THAYER'S GREEK LEXICON, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

I have to go to church for every service for two months before God will want to look at me. I have to jump through this hoop or that hoop before God will ever speak to me. "

None of that is true.

I think John 3:17 says it best. Most of us know John 3:16, but oftentimes, we miss the next verse that is equally important.

"God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted. Anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him." (The Message)

God loves you. He's not mad at you. He desires to help you and to have a relationship with you.

***If you feel shame because of what you've done,
I'm here to tell you right now, that's not from God.
That's from the devil.***

If you feel like you're in a dark hole of your sin and mistakes, let God pull you out of that. Let his light shine upon you, and allow Him to empower you to move forward into the purpose He has for your life.

Our relationship with God is like a house with many rooms. I don't know about you, but in my house, there's one room that we put all of our junk if company comes over. I really don't want people to look in there because it's a mess.

Oftentimes, we approach our relationship with God in much the same way. If we're not careful, we put all of our junk into one room. We hope God will never find it, but it's pointless because God sees and knows everything. Still, we try to deny Him access to that space. Sure, we let Him in the entryway of our house, maybe even the living room. We let Him sit in our chair, hang out in our kitchen, maybe even our bedroom. But there's that one closet or

spare bedroom we just don't want Him to go into because we're afraid of what He might find.

Those dark places in your life need God. Don't think for a minute that those dark places could keep you from what God has for you. Don't think for one moment that if He finds out about those things, He will run away from you. God loves you. He wants to be a part of every aspect of your life. How can God help you with those things if you don't let Him in?

Again, if you feel like you're in a dark hole of your sin and mistakes, let God pull you out. Let His light shine upon you, and allow Him to empower you to move forward to the purpose He has for your life.

You might be sitting there today, reading this book saying to yourself, "I don't have a purpose. God doesn't have a plan for me. I'm a broken and lost cause." That's not God speaking. It's the devil. He is a liar, and that's a lie. You might be asking yourself, "Where am I supposed to start? What's my purpose?" The Bible is pretty clear on what our purpose is as Christians.

1 John 4:8-10 says:

"My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person that refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God because God is love, so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us. God sent his only Son into the world so we might live for him. This is the kind of love we are talking about, not that we once upon a time loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God." (The Message Bible)

What's your purpose?

A really great place to start in discovering your purpose is to **love people**. Pretty simple, right? Love God and love people. By loving others, you'll draw closer to God. The closer you get to God, the more He will reveal His plans for your life to you. God is love. He's a perfect kind of love, an unrelenting kind of love. He desires to give that to you. In fact, maybe you're reading this for the first time

and you feel like you understand that in a new way. Or maybe this is the first time you realized God isn't mad at you, but He just wants to have a relationship with you. Make a decision to make Him the number one thing in your life.

In church lingo, we call that “getting saved.” I call it making God the priority in your life. Maybe you want to recommit your life to Him in a new and powerful way. Maybe you've been following God, but you're saying, "I needed to do it in a different, more powerful way." If that's you, just pray right now. Wherever you're at, if you say it from your heart, it will mean something. It doesn't matter if you're at a coffee shop, in your bed, or in your car. If you say this prayer from your heart, God will respond because that's Who God is.

Just say this: Dear, Lord. I need You. I need Your love and forgiveness. Thank you for sending Your Son, Jesus, to die for me. I declare that I believe that Jesus is Lord. I want to make You the number one thing in my life. I no longer want to be chained down by my shame or past mistakes.

Help me turn and run toward You and never look back. Amen.

Wow, wow, wow! If you said that prayer just now, all of Heaven is throwing a party at this very moment. You just made the greatest decision of your life, and it will forever change your life for the better. If you said that prayer just now, I want to encourage you to find a Christian you know and trust and tell them. Let them know what you've just done, and let them help you take the next steps in your relationship with God. If you don't have a person like that, simply go to my website, ***www.brandon-kerr.com/nextsteps*** and fill out the form provided so I can help you. I'm so excited that you are now experiencing the power of God's unrelenting love!

3 - GOD'S PLAN

The word love has many different meanings. We live in a culture where love is associated with things like sex, pain, struggle, lies, etc. To fully understand what love is, we have to look at what the Word of God says about it. Once we've established a solid foundation of what love is supposed to look like, we can move forward, in not only the way we love people, but also in how we receive love from God. My all-time favorite passage of scripture is 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. In this passage Paul describes what perfect love should look like. It's a great picture of how God loves us, and also how we are to strive to love others. I want you to really think about

those two applications as we break this scripture down.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says,

"Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy it does not boast, it is not proud, does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrong. Love does delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (NIV)

Love is Patient

Everyone has different levels of patience. In this Scripture, patience means to persevere patiently and bravely. It also means to be patient. To bury the offenses and injuries of others. So what does that mean for us?

It reiterates what I stated in the last chapter: God isn't mad at you. He's not up in heaven, trying to make you slip up, or waiting for you to mess up again. He hasn't left you. ***He is constantly present.***

He's unrelenting in His desire to have an ongoing relationship with you and to be there to help you in all you go through in life. We should be showing that same kind of love to others. If you say, "I'm just not a patient person," I have great news for you, ***patience can be learned.***

Patience is not one of those attributes that either you have it or you don't. It's learned. You can work every day at being more patient with people. Even the most patient people still have work to do in this area. Sure, maybe on the outside you display patience, but are you just as patient in your thoughts?

Patience is a mindset that desires to help see someone succeed instead of wanting to see someone fail. It's a mindset that works at seeing things from another perspective than your own, to help produce a genuine care for another person. Patience, even though it's very hard, is essential to love.

Love is Kind

My wife is the kindest person I have ever known. One of the greatest ways she puts her kindness into action is by always using gentle and comforting words.

Kindness is more than just being nice though. The original translation of this portion of scripture really deals with the tone in which we speak and the attitude in which we do things. I can do something nice for my wife in two entirely different ways. I can do it because I feel like I have to or because I want to. Let's be honest, taking out the trash is not the most enjoyable task. If I take the trash out with a bad attitude, that's not really kind, is it? No. It's just taking out the trash. But if I take out the trash with a good attitude and a desire to serve my wife, it becomes a kindness. See the difference? If I sarcastically say to someone, "You're not half bad at basketball." That's not really kind; it's just 50% of a compliment. But if I pause, make eye contact, and let that person know I really mean it, then that becomes a kind word. Are you doing and saying things without kindness, thinking you're being kind? Or are you actually doing and saying kind things?

We all fall into this trap all the time. But I'd say it's time to change.

Love Does Not Envy or Boast, and It is Not Proud

It's interesting to me that these three attributes are placed together into one thought. Envy speaks of having hatred toward and jealousy toward another. To boast is to talk up yourself to others. And being proud is to put yourself higher than others in your mind.

All these attributes surround the way we think of ourselves internally, and how we project that idea onto others.

Yeah, I know, that stings a little, but it's true. We all have ideas of ourselves that, if we don't allow God to fix, will turn into an outward expression in how we treat people.

Jealousy is wanting what someone else has, but it comes from not being content with what you have. Being content with what you have is saying, "God, thank You for all that You've given me, but I also understand You have so much more for me. God,

help me enjoy the place You have me now, and help me look forward with a faithful heart to where You're taking me." This protects us from being the person who treats our friends poorly when they share good news. We should celebrate the victories of others, instead of looking down on them with envy.

Boasting and being proud is talking yourself up in front of others. Always needing to be the center of attention, you tend to look at yourself as better than others. One thing I love about God, is you don't ever have to fight for His attention. He's available anytime, anyplace. If we allow God to be the source of our identity and the focus of our attention, we will in turn not look for attention and justification in the wrong places, and in the wrong ways. True love, lays aside oneself to help another feel important and loved.

Love Does Not Dishonor Others. It is Not Self-Seeking

Have you ever met someone who is constantly critical? They say things like, "If I was doing this, I'd ..."

or "If I had my way..." or "If I was being honest..." It's very frustrating, huh? In fact, it can be very hurtful as well. It's not our job to be critical. ***It's our job to build up, support, and encourage.*** When we talk about dishonoring someone and self-seeking, I equate it to a critical spirit. A spirit that is constantly looking to critique and get its own way. Oddly enough, this can be a great strength if we give this back to God. Instead of having a critical spirit, it turns into a supporting, encouraging, and a "I-got-your-back" mentality.

Instead of looking for everything wrong with something, you begin to anticipate ways you can help another achieve what they're trying to do. Instead of always thinking your way is best, you look to see how you can contribute to the idea of another.

You begin to have a collaborative mindset, instead of a controlling one.

Love is not critical; it's constructive. Love is not self-seeking; it puts others first. Aren't you glad Jesus decided to selflessly act this out on the cross for us?

Love is Not Easily Angered

I grew up having a short temper. I still struggle with this all the time. Most people who know me find it hard to believe. On the outside I may seem to have it all together while on the inside I'm battling against the desire to lash out in my anger. If you struggle in this area, you know how much of a battle it can be in your mind. Perhaps you are a person who struggles with a short temper. You are able to conceal it outwardly but not inwardly. No matter how anger shows up, work on allowing God to address all the other things prior to that verse. Look at being patient and kind. Don't be envious, boastful, or proud. Don't be critical or self-seeking. Concentrate on those things as your first response, and you'll find temper never even enters into the equation.

It Keeps NO Record of Wrongs

Have you ever felt like God is frustrated with how many times you mess up in the same area? When

you mess up, do you feel like God is placing another tally mark on a score sheet? Thank God He's not like that. Lamentations 3:22-24 says,

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercy has never come to an end. They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I will hope in him.'" (ESV)

God has a new kind of mercy for you every single day. I love that. It's not the same mercy you experienced yesterday. It's a brand new kind, created for right now. God's not keeping a tally of all your wrongs. He literally wipes them away and never brings them up again. Isaiah 44:22 says,

"I have swept away your offenses like a cloud. Your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you." (NIV)

I believe the revelation of this in your life will stop you from doing this to others. When we embrace that God has not only forgiven our sins but has also forgotten them, it will change us. It will also change the way we forgive others.

Love Does Not Delight in Evil, but Rejoices With the Truth

Just like a cartoon snowball that starts at the top of a mountain and rolls down collecting more snow, trees, rocks, and whatever other debris it may pick up along the way, gossip grows and grows. It's interesting how one negative word behind someone's back can gain so much energy. Soon it gets way out of hand.

Some say, "Well, I wasn't the one saying it, so I'm not to blame." According to this scripture, all are guilty. When we delight in the evil words of others instead of speaking truth, love is nonexistent in that moment. "Well, I didn't mean anything by it really." Sounds like that person is delighting in evil instead of rejoicing with truth. "Well, what I said was true; so it's okay." Rejoicing with the truth means the truth that is written in the Word of God. We shouldn't be speaking poorly of our brothers and sisters. Instead speak strength, life, and love over

them. That's how we rejoice in the truth. Proverbs 18:21 says,

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue." (ESV)

Let us choose life instead of death.

It Always Protects, Always Trusts, Always Hopes, Always Perseveres

This sums up really well how we should treat others. We should always be looking at ways we can protect one another, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. We should always show someone we are willing to trust them. Notice, I didn't say blind trust, but that we are **willing** to trust them. We should always be hopeful for others. Hopeful that the plans of God would come into their life in a powerful way.

And finally, we should never give up. Galatians 6:9 says,

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up." (ESV)

If we keep loving, we'll see a great and powerful thing produced from it. Aren't you thankful that God protects us? That He has entrusted us with the life we've been given and the gifts that come with it? That he's prepared a great plan full of hope for the future (Jeremiah 29:11)? Aren't you thankful that He will never give up on us.

First Corinthians 13 so powerfully teaches us how to love others, but it's also a great revelation of God's unrelenting love for us. This is how God loves us every day, every second and every moment. A lot of times our idea of love gets skewed because of our background, our culture, how we grew up, and the friendships and relationships that we've gotten along the way. I would encourage you to allow love to be defined by God in your life. The way we allow it to be defined by God is by embracing His Word. This scripture is a great place to start. It really out-

lines and defines the way that God loves us. In turn, if we embrace God's definition of love, it will change the way we love others. The reality is, God is a God of unrelenting love. But in the same way, as Christians we are supposed to love in an unrelenting way, too.

4 - VIEW FROM A TREE

Every day the same old routine. He drug himself out of bed with little, if any, hope that today was going to be any different. Every day he went about his job as people showed their disgust and hatred of the person he had become. They didn't know him even though they thought they did. That was the life he chose, though. A life that once agreed upon ... separated him from his own people. But it paid the bills and a little more. When he wanted some sort of resemblance of friendship or relation-

ship, he had to find it in the darkest of places. But where else was he supposed to go? It's all he had.

Every day, same old routine. Get up, be hated, and lose a little more hope that life would ever amount to something worth living. He stopped at one of his rounds for the day to collect taxes only to hear that “He” was coming to Jericho. No way! The one whom he had heard so much about was passing through his small town. The one they called Teacher, Healer, Savior. Maybe he could find a little glimmer of hope in Him. He dropped everything and headed for the main road in hopes to get ahead of the crowds to meet the one they called the Messiah.

When he arrived, he realized very quickly he wouldn't be able to see past all the crowds of people. He began to look for options. “Maybe I should just give up. Nothing was going to come of it. I've already picked my lot in life. There's no turning back, and no one can save me now. I'm too far gone,” he thought to himself.

The sun beat down on him as sweat poured down his face. He was exhausted from rushing to get to the feet of the Messiah. Then he saw it. A sycamore tree. He used to climb them as a child back when everyone still liked him and he was welcomed into everyone's home. Now things were different. Those kids he grew up with now resented him for the job he had taken and the life he had chosen.

He thought to himself, "If I climb that tree, I could see Him. But, grown men don't climb trees. People will laugh, people will judge. I've already lost too much, it's not worth it."

Or was it? Was it worth it?

As he thought to himself, he asked a better question, "Can I afford to miss this? To miss Him? This might be my only chance. As for climbing a tree, well I don't have the respect from anyone anyways. Might as well go for it."

Seeing the giant crowd drawing closer where the Teacher was undoubtedly at the center, he walked over to the tree. He put two hands on the first branch and thought to himself as he paused, "Do I

really want to do this?" He shook his head, and on he went, climbing a few branches to get high enough to see "Him."

The crowd drew closer, and he could see a man in the middle, like an eye of the storm. Everyone was centered around this one man. "Everyone said He was a king, but He doesn't look like a king. Where are His expensive clothes? He looks normal, like anyone else." But as "He" drew closer, he began to see what everyone else saw. Something was different. He felt something different as the Man drew closer. He couldn't put a finger on it, but he felt something come over him that he hadn't felt for a long time. **Hope**. Just as he was thinking and feeling all of these things, his heart dropped as he heard someone from the crowd call his name, "Zacchaeus."

"This is it. Here it comes. Someone from the crowd is yelling at me to go away." he thought to himself.

Hope drained out of him as he looked to see who it was. Again he heard it: "Zacchaeus." His eyes met the one who was calling his name, and he couldn't

believe his eyes. It was “Him.” It was Jesus. “Why is He calling my name? ” he wondered. “Judgment and shame. What business did Jesus have talking to me except to chastise me in front of the whole city?” As he scanned the crowd, expressions on people's faces alluded to the fact that they imagined the same thing. They thought Jesus was going to finally set Zacchaeus straight. Judgment was coming.

The next words that came out of Jesus' mouth shocked him. Shocked the crowd. "Zacchaeus, come down from there. I want to be a guest in your house today." "What is happening," he wondered.

“Jesus wants to come to my house? Jesus. Does He realize who I am? I mean, He has to know who I am. Everyone knows who I am. I'm the sellout, the tax collector. Born into Jericho. A Jew. And now I work for the very dictator that rules over them. Over my own people. I'm the one who does the dirty work and takes that which he wants without repercussion”, he continued to ponder. “Jesus knows who I am, yet He would risk His own reputation to offer hope to mine. What is this? Who is

this? I can't believe it. I can't believe what's happening to me. This is going to change my life," he thought.

Zacchaeus got out of the tree, walked up to Jesus and led him to the house. All was quiet except for the whispering that began to rise from the crowd. "Who does he think he is? Doesn't He know that's Zacchaeus? He's the scum of the earth. He's worse than that. How dare He!" Zacchaeus heard it all. But it didn't affect him this time.

Before those jaunts would take a little more hope out of him every time he heard them. But today was different. His focus was on Jesus. His hope was returning, because for the first time he knew ***his hope came from a source that would not and could not run dry.*** He had joy in his heart. Most of all, he felt acceptance, care, kindness, and for the first time since he had played in sycamore trees with his childhood friends—love. He couldn't put into words what he was feeling as he led Jesus to his house.

He couldn't help but blurt out the first thing that came to his mind: "I'm changing. I'll never be the same. I'm giving up this old way of life. I'll give back everything I stole. In fact, I'll give back four times." He couldn't believe what he was saying. Before he was always focused on himself, always selfishly thinking of how he could get ahead. Now all he could think about was the people he had hurt and how he could make it right. Normally, he would push those ideas deep, deep down and then he would go back to being selfish. But it felt right. It felt good. He wanted to show others the love he had just experienced from Jesus.

Jesus responded back with a smile, "Today you're saved. Today you're new. You are a true son of Abraham." Zacchaeus and the crowd were shocked. Jesus just let him back in. Before this moment, Zacchaeus could no longer commune with his people, the Jews. They'd shut him out. He had done the unforgivable. And yet Jesus just gave him a new identity. The King of the Jews just welcomed him back in front of all these people. Jesus continued, "I came to seek and save those who are lost." Zac-

chaeus couldn't believe what he was hearing. A flood of emotions filled his heart. For the first time he knew who he was. He had an identity. And he was loved. He had come face to face with God's unrelenting love.

Luke 19:1-10 is by far one of my most favorite stories of Jesus' ministry. What's amazing about this passage is how Jesus wasn't, and to this day still isn't, afraid to step into what everyone else sees as filth and unwanted. I love Jesus. He sees us for the potential and the greatness that He put in each and every one of us. Psalm 139:13 says, "**He knit us together before we were ever in our mother's womb.**"(NIV) He created us, and He put great things in us. When He looks at us, He sees the potential and the great things that He's given us. He sees **a future, and a hope**, as it says in Jeremiah 29:11.

Hopefully, this chapter has changed the way you think God looks at you. Hopefully, it changes your identity. More importantly, I hope it changes the

way you look at others. Everyone deserves to know about the unrelenting love of God.

We learned from this chapter that unrelenting love brings **hope. In fact, it brings an infinite amount of hope. And it brings change--real change.** Just look at Zacchaeus' response. He does a 180 in his life. He turns from his evil and runs toward Jesus. Zacchaeus' life would never be the same. His past no longer dictated his future because now it was found in Jesus.

Have you ever known anyone like Zacchaeus before he met Jesus? We all have. In fact, we were all once just like him, in need of God's unrelenting love.

5 - LOVE FOR ENEMIES

Have you ever dealt with a bully? Someone who picked on you and gave you a hard time? You know, that person you dreaded seeing every day?

Growing up in Nebraska, during the winter months, we always dealt with ice and snow. When you drive in the snow, giant ice globs (my scientific term) collect behind the tires on your car. These giant ice globs would periodically fall off in the road. As kids,

we loved throwing these globs and watching them explode as they hit the ground.

One day as I was walking home from school, a classmate threw one right at me. I'll never forget the moment it hit me between my eyes. I remember hitting the ground, putting my hand to my face, and feeling blood. Being a young child, the sight of blood and the pain I was feeling was more than I could handle. My friend and I freaked out. Even the kid who had just thrown the giant ice glob was freaking out.

He turned around and ran away as I ran into the house to be consoled by my mom. It was a bad day. I got two black eyes and a huge cut on my nose. I was so upset and frustrated at this kid who hurt me. You see, this kid wasn't really a friend of mine. In fact, he picked on me a lot in school, so I wasn't really fond of him. Going to school the next day was so hard. I avoided him the best I could and didn't want anything to do with him.

That's usually our response as kids when we are confronted with people who are mean to us -- our

enemies. It's interesting because the Bible tells us to do something entirely different with our enemies.

In Luke 6:27-36, it says,

"But to you who are willing to listen, I say love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks, and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much. If you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return. Love your enemies. Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from Heaven will be very great,

and you will truly be acting as children of the most high, for He is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate." (NLT)

Now before you get mad at me, it's in the Bible. I get it. This is a hard pill to swallow. It's hard to love those who don't love us back. In fact, it feels impossible sometimes. I'll be the first one to say there are people in our lives who are abusive to us, and we may need to separate from them in order to protect ourselves. But, God commands us to love even our enemies.

I'm never going to claim to understand what you've gone through or what you're feeling because of how you've been treated. But, what I can tell you is this: You will find peace, strength, and restoration in the arms of Jesus.

In Luke 6:27a, Jesus starts out by saying, ***"But to you, who are willing to listen,"(NLT)*** I find that ironic and interesting because to love our enemies is the exact opposite of what the world teaches. The world tells us to protect ourselves and to get

what's ours. If somebody is mean to me, I should give it right back. But Jesus' message is completely different. In fact, His life and His example tells us something completely different.

He loved us. He died on a cross for us, even when we had turned our backs on Him. His love is unrelenting love. It continues to push through for you and me. You might be reading this right now and saying, "Brandon, how can you even say this? How do I even begin to love my enemies?"

I think one of the greatest places to start is forgiveness.

Now please understand, to forgive someone doesn't mean to forget everything they've done. When we forgive someone, we make a choice to forgive. It takes time for our feelings to catch up. Forgiveness isn't saying that what somebody has done to you is okay. It's simply saying, "I forgive you for doing what you've done to me, And I am not going to continually hold that against you." You are choosing to let go of the bitterness, anger, and the turmoil that it's brought you in your life. For-

giveness is just as much for you as the other person. I believe that forgiveness allows you to love, even your enemies.

Think for a moment about some of the people who have wronged you in some way, your enemies. Even as an adult, we can find ourselves dealing with bullies. As frustrating as those people are, Jesus still calls us to love them and to treat them as you would like to be treated.

What's next once you've started working through forgiving these people? As challenging as it is, one of the most important things to do is to begin seeing those people as people who deserve to know the unrelenting love of Jesus, too.

Just like we stated before, God loved us at our worst. He loves them in the same way, right now.

Pursuing ways to love your enemies gives you an opportunity to show them who Jesus is each and every day.

The reality is, hurt people, hurt people. If someone is hurting you, chances are, they've been hurt

themselves. Are people speaking negatively towards you? It's probably because they're being spoken to or have been spoken to negatively in their life. Pray for them.

If you can't think of ways to show them love, pray that God would bless them, help them, and that they would find favor. Pray that they would meet somebody who would help them find Jesus.

Do the very thing that you would have wanted someone to do for you when you were in that place. The reality is, none of us are perfect. None of us have a perfect record of treating people the way they should be treated. Unrelenting love is not easy, but it's not impossible. Jesus did it. If we allow Him to, He can help us love in an unrelenting way, too -- even our enemies.

6 - CRAZY FRIENDS

There was a knock at the door. "Who could that be?" he wondered. "It's not like people visit me at this time of day." He opened the door only to find a few of his closest friends. Really, they were the only friends he had these days. When you're paralyzed, the number of friends you have dwindles as you get older. But these friends, they never left his side. They were a little crazy that way.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"He's here, the Healer. We have got to go."

"Whoa, Whoa, whoa," he said. "The Healer? What makes you think He's going to be able to help me?"

"Don't be like that," they said, "You know what He's done. He's gone from place to place, and He heals all kinds of disease and sickness. We believe He can heal you, too."

"You really think so? You really think He can make me walk again?" he replied.

"Yes, let's go," they said.

It was crazy. They loved and cared about him so much. They were willing to put their lives on hold to get him to this Healer. Their faith and love made him believe it. He had hope that something was going to change when He got to the feet of the Healer.

Off they went. They carried him on his sleeping mat. They explained there was no time to waste. "Let us carry you," they said. They were his crazy friends, the ones who would do anything for him. Their love for him caused him to put a crazy amount of trust in them. They hurried to the place

where the Healer was. When they arrived, they saw a giant crowd around the house. One of the friends pushed through to look inside and saw all the important religious leaders inside the house, sitting around the Healer as He taught.

It was quite a big event, and they soon realized there was no way to get their friend to Jesus on the ground level. No one would let them through. As the friend walked back to the group, he shook his head. "There's no way we're getting through that."

"It's okay," he explained, "You guys tried, and that really means a lot."

"We're not finished," explained one of his friends. "We came here to get you healed, and we aren't leaving until you walk out of here with us."

"Well, how are we supposed to get in there?" he asked. "Let's just try again another time."

"No!" they said. "The time is now."

All of a sudden, one of his friends got a crazy look in his eyes. He tended to get that look when he had cooked up some crazy plan. Like when they

were kids, he came up with a crazy plan for all of them to ... well, that's another story for another time. His friend looked at him, then looked at the group of friends. "I've got it," he said. "Let's get him on the roof. We can remove the tiles up there and lower him down. You get the rope. You get the ladders. I'll get us ready."

All of his friends moved into action without missing a beat like they hadn't just heard the craziest plan ever. He spoke up, "Guys, this is crazy. You don't have to do this." None of them listened. They just kept moving forward with the plan. He couldn't believe how fortunate he was. He had friends who truly cared for him, loved him enough to try to pull this crazy stunt for him. People normally didn't do this kind of stuff for him, but these weren't normal friends.

They got onto the roof, which wasn't a small feat, and began to dismantle it above where they thought the Healer was. As they pulled back the roof, the noise was quite distracting. As the crowd looked up, they saw something being lowered. "What was happening?" the crowd wondered. The

religious leaders began grumbling and yelling. Suddenly, the Healer silenced them all.

He arrived safely to the floor lying on his mat unable to move. Speechless at the feet of the one they called Messiah, he saw his friends all peering through the hole they had created, watching in anticipation of what was about to happen. Their faith gave him faith that something could happen. He looked at the Healer, and he knew. He believed. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior. The one he had learned about throughout his entire life. He could do it. He could heal him.

Jesus spoke, "Young man, your sins are forgiven." He was shocked. Jesus spoke about forgiveness with love in His voice. He heard all the religious leaders murmuring and grumbling, saying, "Who does He think He is? That's blasphemy, only God can forgive sins." Jesus responded. "Why do you question this in your hearts? Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or, 'Stand up and walk'? So, I will prove to you, that the Son of Man has the authority on Earth to forgive sins." (Luke 5:21-24)

Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man, and He said, "Stand up, pick up your mat and go home." (Luke 5:24) With that, something happened. Something changed. He could feel something in his legs. He could feel his toes. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. He felt strength return to his body. He felt a something he had never felt before. He was still. He couldn't believe it. He was amazed and shocked. He was in awe. He was happy.

He made eye contact with his friends, and they knew before he even moved. Excitedly, he jumped up and grabbed his mat. His friends began to cheer, "Mission accomplished!" His friends hurried down the ladder and pushed through the crowd. They all rejoiced, shouted, and cheered. They left that place with so much joy and thankfulness. Their friend had been healed, and he had a new lease on life.

His head hit the pillow that night thinking of the amazing thing that had happened to him that day. If it weren't for his friends, he never would have gotten to see Jesus. He wouldn't have been able to.

The love of his friends helped him get to where he needed to go. Love changed his life. Because of their love, he came face-to-face with a new love, the love of Jesus, and it was unrelenting.

Luke 5:17-26 shows us what the love for another can do. I love the friends of this paralyzed man. They're crazy. They did something most people wouldn't do. They had an unrelenting love for their friend. It was a belief that Jesus could change their friend's life that spurred on this crazy act of love. They got their friend to the feet of Jesus, and they knew Jesus would do the rest.

Two questions come to mind as we continue this journey together.

#1 Do you and I have friends like this?

#2 Are we this kind of friend to others?

We all need friends, who no matter what we're going through, remind us of who Jesus is in our life. In the same way, we need to be those kind of friends to others. We need to be unrelenting in our love for

others, by getting those we love to the feet of Jesus and rejoicing with them when they arrive.

Who can you be that crazy friend to right now?

Who is that friend for you right now?

If you don't have one, go find one. Find someone who is pursuing that crazy kind of unrelenting love. Maybe you will have an opportunity to display some unrelenting love to someone else, and in the process you'll get them to the source of that love, Jesus.

7 - LOVE IS A VERB

Matthew 14:13-14 says,

"Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick." (ESV)

Have you ever had a bad day? Maybe someone messed up your order at the drive-through or took your spot in the parking lot. Perhaps someone indirectly called you out on social media. No, I mean

like a really bad day. Maybe one of those days where the air conditioner, water heater, and car all break down at once. What about when tragedy strikes?

That's where we find Jesus in this passage. John the Baptist, a friend of Jesus', has died The scripture tells us that when He heard, "He withdrew, but a crowd followed Him".

What do we know about this crowd? We know they didn't give Jesus His space. They were in great need, and they believed Jesus could help them.

Jesus responded with **compassion**. What is compassion? The original translation of this passage of scripture defines compassion as an actual feeling deep in yourself, literally in your intestines.² That's pretty crazy. Back when the Bible was written, people believed that the seat of love and pity were in the intestines or the bowels.

² G4697 - splanchnizomai - Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV). Retrieved from <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G4697&t=KJV>

What does that mean? You may be thinking right now, "You're talking crazy, Brandon." Well, compassion means that Jesus was moved deep inside Himself with love and care for this crowd of people so much that He was about to do something. And what did Jesus do? He healed their sick.

It doesn't say Jesus healed three sick people or 17 sick people. It says He healed all the sick. Now, I don't know about you, but on my bad days, I really don't feel like helping people. I really don't feel like loving people. In fact, all I want to do is go home, sit on my couch, relax, and watch some TV. Not only does Jesus heal the sick, but then He also feeds everyone. He performs yet another miracle. He takes a few pizzas and some hamburgers and multiplies them to feed over 10,000 people. (That was the Brandon Kerr version of the Bible). But He took a few fish and some loaves of bread to feed people.

Can you imagine over 10,000 hungry people needing to be fed? We know it's 10,000 people because scripture says that there were 5,000 men. Matthew 14:21 says,

"And they had eaten were about 5,000 men besides women and children." (ESV)

There were 5,000 men plus women and children, so there were at least 10,000 people, probably more like 15,000 to 20,000. Talk about a giant impromptu potluck. Am I right? Just think about that for a moment.

It says, Jesus healed their sick. Think about how many people are there. Jesus made sure to see all of them, heal the sick, feed them all, while just being hit with one of the worst days of his life because of finding out his friend had died.

This is an incredibly powerful moment that we read here. We see that Jesus didn't just feel love for people. He was also moved with compassion, and He ***acted upon it.***

Love is a verb. Compassion moves you to action even when you don't feel like doing it. Now, don't get it twisted. Compassion isn't only intentions. It's not just good ideas or good planning. It's not simply a nice thought.

Compassion moves our love into action.

God's love is such an amazing gift. We have to receive it, open it up, and allow it to be a part of our lives. Just think about Christmas morning. You wake up excited and start to walk downstairs. You see the giant Christmas tree surrounded by all the beautifully wrapped presents. Each gift has a different name on the tag. You find the one that has your name on it. It's beautifully wrapped, but you don't open it.

How crazy would it be if you just walked around with that unopened present? People would comment on how beautifully wrapped that gift was, and you would agree. But you would never get to experience what's inside that present until you opened it.

It's crazy to think about walking around with a wrapped present for the rest of your life, but sometimes that's how we approach the gifts of God. God's unrelenting love is no different. You're walking around and you haven't received it. More impor-

tantly because you haven't received or opened it you cannot share it with those around you.

Have you ever put together a puzzle? Can you imagine putting together the most beautiful puzzle only to realize that the final piece is missing, and nowhere to be found.

Imagine being a cook. You are making a recipe and discover there's a vital ingredient you need in order to make that recipe complete--only you don't have it; and now you won't be able to finish what you've started.

Picture this: Maybe you're a builder working on a project, only to find you're missing a part to finish it. But, you guessed it, without that vital part the project it remains incomplete.

Let's take that a step further. What about that person that you see every day? Maybe you see them when you go to a gas station to get your morning coffee. Perhaps it's that person at the grocery store that you see once a week. Maybe it's your neighbor. Maybe it's a family member. Maybe it's a co-worker that you see every day.

Imagine if all these people who we are talking about were trying to put the puzzle of their life together. They just don't have that final piece. Maybe they're trying to put all the right ingredients in life into their recipe, but they're just missing that final ingredient. Maybe there's that one little part they're missing to complete that project.

Now, all of these are obviously analogies, but they paint a perfect picture. The reality is, we possess that missing piece, that missing ingredient, and that missing part. It's Jesus and His unrelenting love. There are people we come into contact with every day who need to experience the unrelenting love of God, but because of our fear, timidity, apathy or stagnation, we don't give them the missing piece, the missing ingredient or their missing part. Now, I'm guilty of this too. But, how long are we going to be selfish with the incredible gift of God and His unrelenting love?

I have a few favorite restaurants, and one of the reasons is their secret sauces. Everyone loves secret sauces. Maybe it's a dipping sauce, salsa or a special sweet sauce for a dessert. Everyone loves

secret sauces. I know I do. I always try to figure out what's in them. Who knows what makes up those delicious sauces? ***They complete the dish.***

In life that secret sauce is Jesus and His unrelenting love. The greatest thing about this secret sauce is we can share the recipe.

Intentions without actions are ultimately meaningless.

A great idea without execution fails in the end.

I would challenge you to not just have a good intention or a great idea of how to show someone God's love or share the story of Jesus to someone, but to ***do it.***

It doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes we overthink these kind of actions. Sometimes we plan ourselves out of actually doing something. It could be as simple as buying someone a cup of coffee or texting them an encouraging word. It could be spending time with that person and listening to them share. We can be confident, though, that as we take a step in faith, God will begin to work on

our behalf and open up a door to share the ultimate gift, the secret sauce, and that is Jesus and His unrelenting love.

What are the things that are stopping you right now from sharing God's unrelenting love with someone? Isn't that ultimately what love is? Sharing Jesus with someone else. Maybe you're saying, "Well, they're already a Christian. They already know Jesus." That's awesome. Show them love anyway. Do something practically to bless them and help them in their life.

I go back to this story with Jesus in Matthew 14. Jesus just had a horrible day, but He decided to look past what was going on in His life to help meet the needs of others. What a beautiful picture of unrelenting love! What a beautiful picture of compassion, love on the move.

So, what can you do? What can you do for someone else? How can you show someone love? How can you take an intention and turn it into an action? How can you take a great idea and execute it? I'll

leave you with this great truth from 1 John 3:16-18, which says:

"We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion, how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions." (NLT)

What a powerful scripture! It paints this beautiful picture of what we are to do with the love that we've received from Jesus. We should in turn love others. I love how practical this scripture is. If you see somebody who needs something and you have the means to help them, help them. It doesn't have to be complicated. Ironically, there's nothing in the scripture that says you have to put the God stamp on it. Maybe it's just a cup of coffee, nothing else, nothing more.

As you begin to share with others in practical ways, God will begin to work on your behalf. He will open

doors for us to share the ultimate gift of Jesus and His unrelenting love. Don't be dismayed. Do something out of love and compassion for another person, and don't worry about getting anything in return .

So, be confident. Take a step. Move toward what God is calling you to do. Share the unrelenting love of Jesus Christ.

8 - I WONDER IF

We've all asked a question that sounded something like this: I wonder if...? I wonder if I hadn't eaten that last slice of pizza? I wonder if I hadn't put on deodorant this morning? I wonder if that person hadn't spoken those negative words over my life? I wonder if that person hadn't spoken those encouraging words over me? From not so serious to the very serious we have all asked that question before: I wonder if...? In this chapter we are going to look at how this question pertains to one of the most famous figures in the Bible.

Her name is Esther. She was a powerhouse. Esther was known to many as so many different things. She was a queen and a , savior to her people. She was beautiful, courageous, bold, wise, favored, strong, loyal, faithful, graceful, and truthful. But before she was any of those things, she was a **daughter**. She was born to Abihail, her father, and her mother who was an unnamed Jew. We don't know how, but both of her parents died. She was left as an orphan. But her older cousin, Mordecai, adopts her and raises her as his own daughter (Ester 2:7).

I encourage you to read the book of Esther. It's jam-packed with revelation and incredible insight into who God is and the power of His anointing.

So who is Mordecai? Mordecai is from the tribe of Benjamin within the Jewish nation. He was exiled from his homeland to Babylon. He was a part of the group that includes such great people in the Bible as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They're big deals. He's a big deal, and Esther, is an even bigger deal. So Mordy (that's what I like to call him) has a younger cousin who is orphaned during the time they're exiled. He takes on the responsibili-

ty of raising her as his own child. No big deal, right? Really think about that for a moment. Put yourself in his shoes. You've lost everything. You've been exiled to a foreign land. You decide to take on raising someone else's child. Not just any child. It says in Esther 2:7 that she was beautiful and lovely. Oh boy, any dad reading this understands the woes of Mordecai's life as he raised a beautiful, lovely young woman. Think about all the boys he had to give those death stares to in order to protect his daughter.

Remember that question we started with? I wonder if...? I wonder what would have happened if Esther was never adopted by Mordecai? What would have happened if she was never encouraged or supported by Mordecai? What if she was never taught about the history of her people and how God had saved them time and time again? I wonder if Esther was never loved by Mordecai the way a father should love his daughter would she have played such a pivotal role in history that she's known for today? The reality is this: Esther's greatness was manifested by God because of her choice to allow

God to use her and to express the God-given gifts that were inside of her. Mordecai also plays a pivotal role, as well, in this story. Mordecai influenced Esther's life. He loved her and cared for her.

I wonder if...?

Think about that. Are there people in your life (your spouse, your kids, a coworker, a friend, or your brother or sister) who look up to you as if you were a father or a mother? Is your legacy being passed down to someone else? Little by little Mordecai's legacy echoed through Esther's life as well.

We first read about Mordecai in Esther 2:21-23. One day as Mordecai was on duty at the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthana and Teresh ... Pause. What a name. Bigthana? Really? Sounds like a giant wrestler- warrior man. I imagine Bigthana as a 7 foot giant that has a giant beard, red bandana around his head, the skins of animals he's killed as his clothes and a giant spear in his hands. Anyway, it goes on to say in Esther 2:21-23, they were guards at the door of the king's private quarters. They became angry at king Xerxes and plotted to

assassinate him, Mordecai heard about the plot and gave information to Queen Esther. She then told the king about it and gave Mordecai credit for the report. When an investigation was made and Mordecai's story was found to be true, the two men were impaled on a sharpened pole. This was all recorded in the book of the history of King Xerxes' Reign.

This first moment that we see of Mordecai is interesting to me because it shows that Mordy is loyal; loyal to two things. He's loyal to authority in his life- in this case King Xerxes, and he's also loyal to truth. It's an incredible trait of Mordecai's, and we'll see this play out in Esther's life, later on. This might seem like a small detail, not a big thing. But think about the small things that we do on a consistent basis and how they can impact people in a big, big way. I encourage you to be loyal to truth in your life and show an example of serving the people who God has put in your life.

So by now, if you didn't know, Esther becomes the queen of King Xerxes. Now there's a bad guy to this story. His name is Haman. Haman was the king's

right-hand man and he loved it when people bowed down to him and made him feel important. Mordecai, however, didn't give him the satisfaction. Every time Haman would walk by Mordecai, he didn't get the kind of admiration that he wanted. Because of that, he became angry with Mordecai. We read in Esther that Haman got so upset that he plotted to destroy not just Mordecai, but all of his people, and "all his people" included the entire Jewish nation!

Now Mordecai finds out about Haman's plan. We read in Esther 4:10-17, that Mordecai explains this to Esther, and requests that Esther go to the king and petition for their people. Check out Esther's reply. It says in Esther 4:10-17,

"Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai, "All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king and his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. The king has not called for me to come to him for 30 days. So Hathach gave Esther's message to Mordecai."

Mordecai sent this reply, to Esther. "Don't think for a moment that because you're in this palace, you'll escape when all the other Jews are killed. Do you keep quiet at a time like this? Deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this." Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai, "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same, and then, though it's against the law. I'll go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered. (NLT)

The fact that Esther responded to Mordecai the way she did, meant that she trusted Mordecai. We don't see Esther swayed in this moment. Mordecai spoke the truth. As hard as it may have been, he still spoke the truth. She responded out of the love Mordecai had for her, and had demonstrated throughout her life. His desire to teach and train

her to follow the truth, continued to encourage the gifts that God had put inside Esther.

We express our love and care for the people we love, in life, by our example and by encouraging them to follow and be obedient to God. This encourages the gifts that God has put inside of them. Your consistency and your truth continues to be an example of who God truly is, and can be, in their life. Because Mordecai had laid a foundation of trust throughout Esther's life, that included honesty in the relationship, he was effective in this big moment.

Truth and honesty in the little moments gives you the opportunity to speak into someone's life in the big moments.

Truth and honesty might not be in the definition of love, but I will tell you this: ***you cannot love without truth and honesty.*** I want to encourage you today. Are you embracing truth and honesty in your life? Because the reality is, your life is echoing in someone else's life, and I don't know about you, but I

would desire that the things that are echoed in their life are truth and honesty, above all else.

As we continue on in our story of Esther, we find some incredible things unfold. Esther goes to the king's court, and the king accepts her in to speak with him. This was already a big deal. Esther found favor with the king, and God continued to lay out the way for deliverance through Queen Esther. The king tells Esther he'll give her anything she wants and she simply requests that Haman, (yeah, the bad guy), and the king would join her for a dinner feast, that night. Now, no man in his right mind would ever say no to a lot of food. The king and Haman agree. That night at dinner, the king again asked Esther what she would like. "Anything," he says, "I'll give it to you." (Esther 5:6) The queen simply asked that the king and Haman continue to join her for a feast in the following days, and they agree.

That night, two very interesting things happen. The first is with Haman. As he's going home, he passes by Mordecai. Mordecai, as before, does not bow to Haman, and does not give him what he wants. It

makes him angry and he goes home angry. His family and his friends are there comforting him and telling him that he's not going to be happy until he kills Mordecai. They encourage him to build gallows on which to hang Mordecai. Haman thinks it's a great idea, so he puts an order out to build these gallows and plans to hang Mordecai the next day. (Esther 5:9-14)

Another very interesting thing is going on at the same time Haman is planning Mordecai's demise. In Esther 6:1-3,

“On that night the king could not sleep, so he ordered an attendant to bring the book of the history of his reign so it could be read to him. In those records he discovered an account of how Mordecai had exposed the plot of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the eunuchs, who had guarded the door to the king's private quarters. They had plotted to assassinate King Xerxes. “What reward or recognition did we ever give Mordecai for this?” the king asked. His attendants replied, “Nothing has been done for him.” (NLT)

What an ironic turn of events.

To summarize, the next morning, Haman comes to the king to get approved to hang Mordecai. The king asks Haman before Haman can speak, "What would you do for someone who is so great, who has helped and even saved your king, and who has yet gone unacknowledged?" (Esther 6:4-6) Haman, thinking the king was talking about him and thinking how much praise he would receive, advised the king to take the king's robes and put them on this person, and put this person on the king's donkey and parade him down the streets exclaiming how incredible he was. The king thought it was a great idea, and just as Haman thought this was going to be given to him, the king told him to do this for Mordecai. Haman, devastated, does what the king commands, and very reluctantly puts the royal robes on Mordecai, puts him on the king's donkey, and parades him through the center of town. (Esther 6:7-11)

It's Mordecai's obedience, and loyalty in the seemingly small things he'd done without expecting any acknowledgement. But they laid a foundation, a

legacy, for those who would come after him. It's incredible, because in this story of Esther, this piece lays a foundation for the outcome. Esther comes into the feast the next day and when the king asks what she wants, she explains Haman's plot. She explains what Haman was planning and the king sides with Esther and the entire Jewish nation is saved. (Esther 7:1-10)

It's the small things, sometimes the things you never get credit for, you're never made famous for, that lay a foundation of your legacy for those who come after you. Think about what you benefit from right now because of the people who have come before you. And if you can't say that's true for your life, think about what you can do to help benefit the people coming after you.

How do you want to be remembered? What kind of legacy do you want to leave for those you love, for those you care for? Sometimes we overcomplicate it. I would encourage you to stay consistent in the little things day in and day out. Those things will speak to people over time. It will build a legacy for those you love, and as you consistently display love

to others, by your actions, it will speak volumes for all eternity.

9 - MARATHON NOT A SPRINT

Many times it's easy to start strong, but finishing strong is hard. Life is a marathon not a sprint. So, how do you finish strong as time goes by? How do you create a legacy of God's unrelenting love that possesses the longevity of a lifetime?

God is faithful. He'll always be faithful. That's who He is. He'll always love us. He'll always care for us. He'll always be there. He's always going to be who He says He is. His promises are true yesterday, today and forever.

If you don't like where you're at in life, I have great news for you. It can change starting right now.

Right now. You can allow God to do something different in you **right now**. The fact that you're reading this book and working at allowing God more room to speak to you in your life means that you want to grow and see God do something in you bigger than you've ever seen Him do before.

Remember: God didn't design us to do life alone. He will put people in our life that will help support, encourage and challenge us. As Proverbs 27:17 says,

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man (woman) sharpens another.” (ESV)

Find some friends that sharpen you and strengthen you? Get together with those kind of friends and make a plan to grow together. Read a Bible plan together. Go to a Bible study or church together. Grab a cup of coffee and talk about what God is doing in your life.

God has also gifted us with one of the greatest gifts of all in the Holy Spirit. John 14:26 says,

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (ESV)

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and reveal new things about who He is. The Holy Spirit is one of the greatest pieces of our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit brings guidance, peace, wisdom, clarity, strength and so much more. God is made up of three parts, God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. All three are equally powerful and collectively work in unison to make up God. It is the same way that we as human beings are made up of three main parts; spirit, soul and body. All three pieces of a person don't roam around separately but work together and reside together within a person. By just simply asking God for the Holy Spirit you can receive this great gift in your life. You can read about the filling of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapters 1 and 2. The power that comes with the Holy Spirit is absolutely incredible! If you would like

this gift just ask and the Holy Spirit will be there. Psalm 46:1-3 paints a picture of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit working in our life, it says,

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. (ESV)

What an incredible gift! What an amazing way of experiencing the unrelenting love of God in a new and profound way.

If we only go to God when we need Him, we'll find that our relationship with Him is just a surface relationship. When we do this our relationship with God only exists when we need something from Him but not out of love and a desire to grow in who He has made us to be. Don't just go to God when you need Him. Go to God all the time. Go to God in the good and the bad. Go to God when there are struggles. Go to God when everything seems to be working

correctly. If we go to God consistently, we'll find a flow of His love, strength, and peace consistently in our life.

Think about all the things that are coming in and going out daily in your life. We live in a fast-paced world: social media, TV, Hollywood, podcasts, music, and the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The world can really bog you down mentally if you're not careful. None of those things are inherently bad. If you find yourself mentally bogged down by any of those things, one of the greatest things you can do is take a break from it and spend time refocusing on God and His purpose for your life.

Throughout this book we've discussed the reality that because we have been exposed to the world's viewpoint of what love is our view of God's love can get skewed. If we focus our minds on the things of God we are promised something incredible in Romans 12:2, it says,

“Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to

it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” (The Message)

What an incredible promise! We will be changed from the inside out. That means God will help change our misconceptions and help us see clearly. By seeing clearly we can live with a clarity that only comes from God!

How can you know God if you don't spend time with Him? It's a fairly simple principle, but we constantly forget it.

Have you ever reconnected with a friend you hadn't spoken to in months? They had so much happen in their life you had no clue about. Why? Because you lost touch. We've all been there. However, we can't afford to lose touch with God. He will help us grow and learn more about who He is. In order to love people well, we need to tap into the infinite, unrelenting type of love of God.

There's a great acronym that will help us all create longevity in our relationship with God. It's the F.A.T.

Principle. Kind of a funny acronym, I know. It stands for Faithful, Available, Teachable. The great Jeanne Mayo taught me this. *Always be faithful*, available, and teachable in your relationship with God. Make that a priority. Spend time with Him. When it comes to making time for prayer or reading the Bible people often say, "I don't have time." But remember this:

You will never have time until you make time.

Be available. Make time for God. *Be teachable.* Don't ever approach God like you know it all because He always will know more than you. Allow Him to speak to you.

Make it simple. Make it attainable. One of the greatest principles that I learned is 10 and 10 (10 minutes of prayer and 10 minutes of reading my Bible). Many times we think spending time with God has to be hours and hours a day. If you can spend that much time with God, go for it. I don't think there's anything wrong with it. However, don't overcomplicate it. Just start somewhere. If you're not spending time with God right now, start some-

where. Start with 10 minutes of prayer and 10 minutes of reading your Bible a day. We can all take 20 minutes out of our day to spend time with God. If you're already doing that, maybe add a little more. Just start somewhere that's attainable for you. Find someone who can help keep you accountable and ask you questions about it. There are great resources available today. There are different applications, websites and blogs that will help you grow in your relationship with God. Find like-minded people and grow together. God did not design life to be done alone. He gave us a body of Christian believers, brothers and sisters in Christ, to pursue Him together. As you spend time with God, you'll find that His unrelenting love will change every aspect of your life. And as you have a new revelation of who He is, you'll find a great overflow coming out of your life.

10 - THE PROMISE

1 Corinthians 2:9 says,

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." (NLT)

What an incredible promise that we have in that scripture. I love it! ***"No eye, no ear, no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."*** Did you catch that? All of that incredible stuff comes from just loving him. Wow! If you're pursuing Him and if you love Him, you are on the right track and on the road to great things.

Whether you decided to follow God five minutes ago or 50 years ago, He has something that is great and beyond your imagination.

Isn't that good news! We serve an infinite God! Even if you've been doing life with God for 50 years already, He's still got something more for you. If you've known Him for five minutes, He's not looking for you to fulfill some long list of prerequisites before He'll do something great in your life. He will do it **right now**.

Just think about what that looks like in your life right now. Think about what that looks like in the relationships with people you have. **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined what God has for you."** No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined what God can do in you and through the people you love. God will restore something that was lost.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined what God has planned for you right now in your marriage. What God has for you at your workplace. What God has for you as you pursue

your new career or start your own business. **No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined** what God has planned for you as you begin to experience His call on your life in ministry, or maybe even to pastor a church. **No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined** the new thing that God has put into your life. He is a God of creativity and insurmountable imagination.

We live in a world that is constantly dictated by the confines in which it lives. We're told we can only do so much, can only see so much, and that we can only imagine or create so much. The reality is, however, with God there are no limitations. God does things that are above and beyond anything we can ever hope for or imagine. He is a God of miracles. God can also perform creative miracles in healing you of a disease or sickness. He can eliminate anything that is holding you back from the calling that He has for you.

Isn't it good news? It doesn't say no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who've gone to church for three years, who have read their Bible 75 times or

who have memorized the newest worship song. Right?! That scripture doesn't have any of those prerequisites or hoops to jump through. It just simply states, just love Him, pursue Him, and God will move in your life.

God's unrelenting love is a common thread throughout this entire book. In the same way, as we accept His love in our life, it will also unlock our hearts to love Him in new ways. Let yourself love God. Pursue Him. Open your Bible, and let Him speak to you. As you worship and pray, let Him reveal things to you, change you, and rearrange you. Let him teach you things He wants you to change. Don't be afraid to change things for God.

When we submit to Him, great things happen. In fact, things that ***no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined***. God is preparing great things. God is going to do something new in you. Maybe there's even something happening right this very second.

I believe that as you read this maybe you will get a new song melody. Maybe you'll receive a new idea

to inspire your writing. Maybe a new creative idea that would help grow the Kingdom of God. Maybe you'll receive something that would help grow that business that God has called you to start. Maybe you will speak life into that person you see every day at the gas station grabbing your cup of coffee.

Remember: ***No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind can imagine what God has prepared for you.*** For you! This means He's created and crafted something unique specifically just for you. Isn't that incredible?

I love this scripture. Psalm 139:13,

“He knit us together before we were ever in our mother's womb.” (NIV)

Isn't that an incredible picture? God put things inside of you before you were ever even in your mother's womb? What an incredible promise? That means He put something inside of you that He didn't put in me. He didn't put it in anybody else. In fact, it's specific to just you, which means God has something specifically for you to accomplish in your

life. It's not going to look like anybody else. That's the incredible part of the Kingdom of God.

Just think, God is going to do something through you that's bigger than just you. It's bigger than something that you alone can accomplish. God has something great for you to do that's beyond your wildest dreams.

Jeremiah 29:11 says,

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. 'Plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.'" (ESV)

Do you ever feel like what God has for you is just a minimal amount? Remind yourself that He has a great future and a great hope for your life. For you! Yes, He has this for the person next to you, also. But it's also ***for you too.***

As you accept God's unrelenting love and it begins to change your life, pursue Him and see what He will do.

11 - CONCLUSION

Thank you so much for going on this journey with me as we pursue God's unrelenting love. It's that kind of love that never lets up. It never weakens. It's never yielding. It is determined. God has this kind of love for you and me. What an incredible gift from God!

I would encourage you today, right now, to make a plan as to how you're going to pursue God in a deeper and stronger way. How is it going to change? How are the things God has taught you in this book going to be applied in your everyday life?

As we experience God's unrelenting love, it does something different in our lives. It changes us. It helps change our focus. Ask yourself how that change of focus will look for the people you meet every day? Think about who you will extend the love of God to.

No, really, who comes to mind right now that you can show an unrelenting type of love ? Write it in the margins of this book. Maybe you should take out a piece of paper, or a journal, and write a name (maybe three) who need this kind of unrelenting love.

Next, how are you going to do that? Many times it can be as simple and as practical as making a phone call or sending them a text message. Invite them to go to lunch with you so that you show them His love.

I'm not sure what it is. If you are also unsure, maybe that should be the first thing on your list. Find out how you can help them. Find a practical way of showing them that you love and you care.

Finally, **when** are you going to do it? There is a right and a wrong answer to this. The right answer is to do something right now. Take a moment right now and pray for them. Take a moment right now to put a plan in place and then carry it out. Remember, intentions without actions, are meaningless. Do something about it now. Get out there and take a leap of faith.

I'll leave you with this illustration. It can be very scary to step out in faith and to put yourself out there not knowing how someone will respond. But I can tell you this:

God is faithful.

Sometimes when God calls us to take a step toward Him in obedience, the landscape can be a little fuzzy, not fully in focus. We don't exactly know where God's taking us, but what is in focus is that first step.

Go ahead and take that first step. Each step you take toward what He calls you to do will continue to put that landscape more and more into focus until you find yourself at the doorstep of experiencing

God's unrelenting love. More importantly, you'll find yourself at the doorstep of being able to give someone the greatest gift of all: the unrelenting love of God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon lives with his wife, Charity, in Omaha, NE. Together they minister at Liberty Church. Brandon and Charity have been married since March 1, 2014. They love each other dearly as they pursue the calling God has placed on their lives.

Brandon grew up in a Christian home in Omaha, NE that helped mold him into the man he has become today. Known for being outgoing and an extreme extrovert, he loves being around people and pursuing Jesus with others. He grew up in Omaha, NE and after being a part of a local church in Omaha, NE (Liberty Church) he was offered an opportunity to co-start and lead a ministry school with two of his best friends Mark and Desiree McGaffin. Since the inception of this school, in 2007, Brandon has served as a full time pastor at Liberty Church. Brandon and his wife currently minister as the family pastors at Liberty Church as they pursue bringing God's love and life to the up and coming generations.

Brandon's mission statement is simple: Empower the potential and anointing in the next generation by creating disciples that have honor, integrity and character, while living a consistent life that produces God honoring memories and spiritual families in which all glory is pointed back to Jesus and the cross.

You can learn more about Brandon at www.brandon-kerr.com.

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