

Love in Action at Home

Romans 12:9–21

Concluding the series “Family Strong: Building a Home that Works”

Over the last several weeks, we've been talking about what makes relationships strong. Not perfect. Not conflict-free. Strong. We started by asking what we're building our lives on. Then we talked about conflict, forgiveness, and what to do with hurt that lingers. Last week, we talked about living with people who see things differently than we do. And today, we come to the last message in this series, with maybe the most practical question of all: What does this actually look like on a Monday morning?

Because most of us would say we love our families. But we often assume they already know it. It's like the old farmer whose wife complained one day, “You never tell me you love me.” The farmer replied, “I told you I loved you when I married you, and if I change my mind, I'll let you know!”

We might find ourselves thinking, “They know I love them,” or “I work hard for this family.” And maybe they do know. But there's a real difference between knowing someone loves you and regularly experiencing their love. Sometimes love looks like someone making coffee before you're up, or remembering an appointment you mentioned once, or filling the gas tank because they noticed it was low, or a text that just says, “How'd that meeting go?” None of that is dramatic. Nobody's making a movie about someone unloading the dishwasher. But those small things say something real: I noticed you, and you matter to me. Relationships aren't primarily built in the big moments. They're built in the ordinary ones: kitchens, cars, waiting rooms, school pickup lines, ordinary Tuesdays. So, what does love look like there? That's exactly what Paul gives us in Romans 12.

Before we get into the passage, there's one word at the start of it that changes everything: therefore. Paul has just spent eleven chapters up to this

point in Romans describing what God has already done — God's mercy, God's grace, God welcoming people who hadn't earned their way in, God creating something new out of what looked hopeless. And then he says, therefore. He emphasizes God's grace before he gives instructions, because for Paul, the instructions flow as a response to God's grace, and not the other way around.

God moves toward us before we've cleaned ourselves up. God accepts us as we are, not as a reward for good behavior. And then that same grace keeps shaping how we live, day after day. Romans 12 isn't Paul saying, "Behave better so God will love you." It's Paul saying, "Because God has already loved you this much, watch what that love starts to look like when it shows up in your actual life." The Christian life was never about earning love. It's about learning to live out love we've already been given.

Then Paul gets specific. "Let love be genuine" — real, without pretending. Don't just say it, don't perform it, don't smile in public while resentment runs the house in private. And notice what he does next: he doesn't spend the rest of the passage describing a feeling. He gives us verbs. That's because love is a verb! Honor. Serve. Rejoice. Be patient. Pray. Share. Welcome people in. Bless. Celebrate with people who are celebrating. Grieve with people who are grieving. Live at peace. Feed people who are hungry. Refuse revenge. Overcome evil with good. Paul takes love out of the abstract and puts it in the kitchen, in the garage, in everyday life. Love becomes something people can actually experience, and I think that happens in roughly four ways.

The first is that **love notices**. You can't celebrate with someone if you never noticed they had something to celebrate. You can't grieve with someone if you're too busy trying to fix their problem to notice their pain. At

home, that might look like putting the phone down and actually listening, or thanking someone for something they do so often you stopped noticing it. Sometimes attention itself is the act of love. Think of the caregivers in this room — people caring for a spouse with dementia, adult children driving parents to appointments, families rearranging their whole schedule because someone can't do what they used to. There's nothing glamorous about that kind of love. It's the same answer repeated, another appointment, another meal, patience on a day you don't have much left. And love in action also means recognizing that caregivers need care, too. Paul isn't calling anyone to glorify exhaustion. Sometimes love means receiving help. Sometimes it means saying, "We can't do this alone."

The second is that **love moves toward need**. It doesn't just notice; it responds. Sometimes that's food, sometimes a ride, sometimes an invitation, sometimes just sitting beside someone when there's nothing useful left to say. "Mourn with those who mourn" is harder than it sounds, because our instinct is to fix. Someone tells us they're hurting, and we say, "Well, at least..." Sometimes the loving thing isn't fixing; it's simply saying, "I'm here." I wonder, honestly, if the people closest to us sometimes get the leftovers of our attention. We're patient with coworkers, polite with strangers, and then we come home tired and give our families whatever patience is left over. Romans 12 brings love home. Not just love when it's convenient.

The third is that **love stays faithful when life gets hard**. Paul says rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, keep praying. That's not empty optimism. Some of you are walking through chronic illness, financial stress, grief, estrangement, addiction recovery, a job loss, a parenting season that's flat-out exhausting. Paul isn't saying love makes any of that disappear. He's

saying love keeps showing up, not because it all depends on us, but because God is still at work in it. Prayer matters here because it's the honest reminder that we're not carrying our family by ourselves. And sometimes faithfulness looks like finally admitting, "We need help" — a counselor, a doctor, a friend, a boundary. That can be faithful, too.

And the fourth is that **love refuses to keep score**. "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." This is where Romans 12 starts sounding like the last few weeks of this series, because retaliation feels so natural. You ignore me, I ignore you. That cycle can run through a family for years, even generations, until somebody finally decides, it stops here. Paul writes, "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone," and I love how honest that sentence is. If possible ... because sometimes it isn't. As far as it depends on you ... because you can't control the other person, only your own part. Is there a call I need to make? An apology? A boundary I need to set? I can only do my part. That's not failure; that's just reality. And when Paul says feed your enemy if they're hungry, he's not asking for weakness. He's saying: don't let someone else's worst behavior reproduce itself in you. Evil wins twice if it hurts you and then succeeds in turning you into the same thing that hurt you. Paul says, don't give it that victory.

Which brings us to why any of this is possible at all. Paul isn't calling us to live this way so God will finally approve of us. It's the exact opposite. Look at the mercy we've already received. God noticed us. God moved toward us first, before we had anything sorted out. In Jesus,, God sat at tables with people others had pushed to the edges, touched people others avoided, listened, fed people, wept with people, forgave, served, gave everything. God's love was never theoretical; it took action. And because we've received a

love like that, we're being slowly shaped into people who live that way too. We don't love in order to earn God's acceptance. We love because we're already held in grace. That's the center of this whole series: ***we love because God loved us first.***

So, before we talk about what to do this week, I want to pause here, because maybe your first response today isn't "I need to love people better." Maybe it's simpler and harder than that: "I need to let myself actually receive the love of God." Some of us are excellent at giving — serving, helping, fixing, carrying everyone else. But receiving grace can be the harder thing. Maybe you've spent years believing that if you just do enough, you'll finally be enough. Romans says grace comes first — before your achievement, before your family looks the way you wish it did, before every relationship gets fixed. You are loved right now, as you are. So, before you leave today with another list of things to try harder at, hear this clearly: **you do not have to earn God's love.** You're invited to simply receive it, and let it start changing what moves through you. If that's where you are this morning, your prayer today can be as simple as, "God, help me receive the love I keep trying to earn."

Over five weeks, we've practiced five things, and here they all are together: Connect — give someone your full attention, ask how they're really doing, and stay long enough to hear the answer. Talk — go to people instead of around them, tell the truth without cruelty, and listen. Release — refuse to let resentment become who you are, forgive without pretending the hurt didn't happen. Respect — make room for people who see things differently, and remember love can be bigger than disagreement. And Love — simply do something. Honor someone. Serve. Share. Celebrate. Grieve alongside someone. Show up.

I don't want you to try to fix all five this week. I want you to think of one relationship, and then look at those five words and notice which one your mind goes to first. That's probably your invitation. If it's Connect, give someone ten uninterrupted minutes this week. If it's Talk, have the conversation you keep putting off. If it's Release, name the resentment you're tired of carrying. If it's Respect, ask someone, "Help me understand your side of this." If it's Love, do one concrete thing that makes their life easier.

Imagine a child growing up in a home where adults apologize without excuses: "I did this, it hurt you, that was wrong, here's what I'll do differently.

Imagine homes where people can tell the truth without humiliation, where people can ask for help without shame, where peace matters but nobody pretends harmful behavior is fine. That's a strong family, not because everything goes smoothly, but because love keeps becoming visible there.

And imagine a church shaped the same way: a place where people get noticed, where grief isn't carried alone, where someone walking in for the first time thinks, there's something different about how these people treat each other. That's grace made visible.

Five weeks ago, we started with the image of building a house, and it's tempting to think strong families get built through a few big decisions. But what we've actually seen is that God usually builds with very ordinary material — a conversation, an apology, a boundary, a decision to forgive, a meal, a phone call, a moment when someone decides you matter more to me than winning. One brick doesn't look like much. But one beside another, and another, eventually becomes something strong.

So, maybe the question to carry out of here today isn't "Do I love the people in my life?" It's simpler: "What is my love actually doing?" Let love be

genuine. Let it be real. And remember where it starts — not with our ability to love perfectly, but with a God who already moved toward us in mercy and made room for us in grace. Receive that love. Then let it move through you. Strong families aren't built by perfect people. They're built by imperfect people who keep choosing the way of love with one another, one ordinary day at a time. Wherever you call home — keep building, and let love be real.

Let's pray. Gracious God,

Thank You for loving us first — before we earned it, before we understood it. Today we open our hands and receive that love more fully.

Let it take root in us and flow out — into our homes, our workplaces, our church, our whole lives. Let it show up in ordinary moments and hard ones alike.

Make our love genuine — not performed, but real. Where we've kept score, help us let go. Where we've grown tired, renew us. Where we've held back, give us courage to move toward others.

We can't manufacture this on our own. Keep filling us, so what flows out of us is truly Yours.

In the name of the One who loved us to the end, we pray. Amen.