

Date of sermon: 4/17/2021
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: 1 Corinthians 13:5b - 7
Title of sermon: Love Enables the Impossible
Series: What Matters Most - #5

1 Cor. 13:5b - 7 (NIV) ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Well, welcome to each of you -- both here and online, and we're glad you're here in the middle of this series that we are talking about -- What Matters Most. And where do we get that from? It's Paul, when he says, "And now I want to show you the most excellent way." Tonight, we want to focus on that little phrase about record-keeping. So, if you're a Type C -- kind of an accountant type of individual, tonight is your night. If you're a banker, if you're a financier, if you're a person with the gift of administration -- this is your night, because this is what the passage talks about. Because he says something about in this issue of anger -- love is not easily angered, and here's the line, "...and it keeps no record of wrongs."

One of my favorite guys in the Bible is David. I'm quite aware that he had some really good days and he had some really bad days. David was amazing -- leadership, trust of God -- Goliath, not a problem. You stand in the middle or in the way of God's promise -- ah, he was courageous! Patient. In many ways, he was. He was anointed king, and he didn't actually take possession of that for ten years. And he ran for his entire life during that time. He was running all over the place! Worshiper -- I find it hard to imagine a person with a more developed theology of worship than David. Warrior? Yes. And another reason I like him is because God said, "He's a man after my own heart," and yet, God made sure we saw that David had some difficult seasons in his life. One of them happened to be when his son Absalom, who followed him, took over the kingdom in kind of a revolutionary kind of capacity, and rather than stand up to him and split the entire kingdom, which many encouraged him to do, David left town. And when he left town, he made his way out of town, and there was an individual guy along the side of the road. Shammai. And he was just sitting there when David was making his way out. And Shammai was heckling, kind of mocking David. One of his soldiers said, "Would you like me to run that guy through with a spear?" And David looked at him and said, "No. Leave him alone. Maybe on this day this is what I deserve." You look at that and you think -- Wow. That is kindness.

Fast-forward ten years from that moment. David is towards the end of his life. And he says to one of his soldiers, "Remember Shammai of Gehra -- the Benjamite from Baharim -- do you remember him?" "Yes." And towards the end of his life, these were David's last words: "Do not consider him innocent. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood." And if you go back ten years, I'm thinking, "David, you're one of the most kind, merciful individuals on a day when you're having your kingdom stripped out of your hands by your son -- not God, by your son -- and yet, in that moment you were patient and kind." And yet, ten years later, we know that every day of David's life he thought of that little twerp that was sitting alongside of the road who mocked him on the way out of town, and when he had his opportunity just before he died, said, "Run the spear through him." Now, that's not exactly a great example of what the text says. In fact, it's exactly the opposite. Paul says that one of the things that's going to mark a Christian -- that's gonna matter more than anything -- is not the ability to keep track of wounds that you've experienced, but the ability to forget them. He says, in this text -- "Love is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrong." That's significant, because like David, every one of us in this room today has had relationships,

wounds, things that have happened to us. Sometimes in relationship to God, we feel disappointed in God, we feel disappointed in the body of Christ, and we've had relationships that are painful. It's one of the reasons why I like David. It's because he's a real person. And he's had real things happen to him, just like you. But he teaches us an important lesson that Paul is trying to affirm here for good reason. And we'll see in a minute why. He said, "Love keeps no record of wrongs." It's an accounting term. It is. And it's a resentment where you are placing in a ledger a debit with a person's name next to it.

Now, good accountants -- and we have a phenomenal bookkeeper-accountant at our church, Mary -- she's remarkable. And I have more than a few times asked her, "Can you go back and get this," and BOOM! She can nail it down to the day, down to the penny -- she has it all. It's right there. It's accessible to her. She knows where the dollar went and she knows who spent it! See, what Paul is saying is -- well, if you're gonna be a good Christian and you're gonna be an accountant, you have to choose to have a bad memory. Why? Because when you write it down, it takes root in your heart. How do I know that? David and a thousand other experiences, including probably some of yours. If you write it down, if you mark it somehow -- if you know the date -- if there's an anniversary, and you have begun to put it into the calendar and the rhythm of your heart and your mind, it goes and it takes root. And when you keep record of it, you nurse it. David had to have. For ten years, he remembered that commoner who sat outside his city and mocked him. On that day when he left town, he looked noble, he looked forgiving, and yet he never forgot it. Not in ten years he didn't. And when he had the opportunity, he went back on his day of grace, and he said, "Take his head." How did he do that? For ten years he was nursing that. For ten years, he was nursing that. Ten years, he was running that day through his mind. Ten years, those words that that guy spoke to him were going through his mind and he hadn't forgotten it.

Jay Adams, the counselor, was talking about a couple who came in, and the struggle in their marriage was the mother-in-law, and this lady was struggling with her mother-in-law. And Jay said, "What's the problem?" And the woman pulled out this long list of everything that she had ever done to her. Jay said, "You're a very good accountant; you're just not a very good Christian. You're a very good accountant, you're just not a great Christian." Why? Because it's exactly what the Scripture says! Love keeps no record of wrong. It doesn't write it down. Why? Because when resentment takes root in your heart, it begins to destroy all of your relationships. It does. You see resentment and -- it's true in David's life. It doesn't just stay compartmentalized. Never does. It begins to leak out and begins to create kind of this emotional suicide. What does it look like? Well, a person begins to withdraw, and they become vengeful, and they become vengeful first of all in their mind. Have you ever had one of those relationships? I've had them. Where I have multiple conversations with that person. I don't know about you, but every conversation I have with a person, and that I'm angry at, I win. And I sound terribly logical, and wonderfully filled with the wisdom of God. But at the end of the day, I win. Why? Because that resentment is stirring in my heart and I'm having that conversation that goes over and over and over again. You withdraw, you become vengeful, you're often joyless, you become negative. And at the core of it, you're bitter.

A number of years ago, there was a gentleman who came into my office. Actually, the husband and the wife. His credit card that he got -- apart from his wife -- betrayed him when the bill came. And he had some bad purchases in some places where married or non-married men should not go. His wife was furious, as she should have been. She couldn't get over it. It festered and it festered and it festered. She left him. They got a divorce. He hit rock bottom and repented. He did. He genuinely came to Christ, and met the One who forgives all. She became resentful. She became angry. Oh, she was angry at her husband, and then she got angry at the church, and she got angry at her friends, and she got angry at his friends because they didn't hold him accountable. And she kind of confronted his Bible study leader because his Bible study leader should have known -- after all, he is omniscient, like God, right? All Bible study leaders are. And he should have known. And she just started going down the charts. And you

know, as maybe you've experienced -- it never stops horizontally. She started going vertically. Last I knew of her, she had gone through multiple men, never once again getting married, being hard, promiscuous, and destroyed. Why? He was the one who sinned! Because she's the one who kept a record of wrong. She was the one who was an incredible accountant. And she knew every sin that her husband had committed, and she knew the dollar amount that he put on that credit card. And she had measured the dollar amount that he'd spent and what they could have done in their home, and how he had betrayed her, and everything became what? A notation in the ledger of her heart. It's really tragic -- it is. Because what was his sin was forgiven by God. And what became her sin destroyed her.

That's why Paul says, "Love keeps no record of wrong." My friend -- Paul's exhortation, if you can hear this, is not really first and foremost for the person that you're gonna love and forgive. It's for you. Maybe the most important thing in the issue of forgiveness is that you realize that when you release a person from whatever they have done to wound you, you first and foremost open the prison of your own rage. Martin Luther's wife came down to him one day, and she walked into the house, and she was all dressed in black. Top to bottom. Martin Luther looked at her and said, "Who died?" And she looks at Martin Luther. She goes, "God did." Martin Luther -- you know, the Greek translator of the Bible -- the one who nailed the 95th thesis on the door, the great father of all protestant work -- that Martin Luther, who, yes, had bouts of depression. And he was in one of those bouts of depression. "Who died?" "God died." He looks up at her, and he said, "God didn't die!" And then she wonderfully looks back at him and says, "Then act like it. Act like it. You're wallowing in the wounds and what people have said about you. You're wallowing -- if God's not dead, then quit acting that way!" Why? Because when resentment takes root in your heart, it destroys all of your relationships. So Paul says, "Love is not easily angered. And it keeps no record of wrong."

So, what do you do? Number one. You choose the pathway of forgiveness. And how do you do that? You choose to not remember. You choose. See, if you look down through all of these texts, love doesn't do this, love doesn't do that -- not one of them is how do you FEEL. It's a choice. Love doesn't do this. Love chooses to be kind. Love chooses to be patient. It's a verb -- love chooses to what? Forget. And what you do is, you choose to not go over and over. When I was a little kid -- and I was never a good speller. I wanted to be a good speller. When I was a teacher -- it was embarrassing not to be a good speller. And as a pastor, I don't know why I don't care. But -- I still wish I was a good speller, but I'm not one, and when I hear people that are really good spellers -- my wife is a great speller! She can spell where -- I ask her all the time, "Honey, how do you spell 'much'?" And she looks at me, like WHAT? I don't know, it seems weird today. That's why I like Brian Regan. He's one of my favorite guys. "How do you spell 'cat'?" K A T. You have to watch it -- it's hilarious. Just hilarious. But the reality is, when I was a kid, man, I knew I was not a good speller, so I'd go over the words and over the words and over the words. I love Scripture memory -- I do! Every day, unless I'm just sicker than a dog -- and I don't know where that came from, because dogs usually aren't sick! -- but the reality is, almost every day I go over and over and again, and I have this wonderful app that tells me, "You have to repeat this one every week and every" -- it's marvelous! Why do I do that? Because I want that Scripture in my head, and the only way I can do it is to go over and over it and over it and over it again. And what he says is, don't do that with your wounds. Don't do that with how somebody hurt you. Don't do that with your ex-husband who betrayed you. Don't go over that night. Don't go over that event.

More than I care to tell you, sometimes when husbands and wives have affairs or difficult things happen, they want to know all of the details -- in particular, ladies, and -- this is not a slam on you, this is just my experience. Ladies more want to know all of the events. Where did it happen? What happened? And they want to know. I take them -- I pause, and I say, "Can I go talk with you? Do you want every one of these details in your mind? And by the way, what are you gonna do with it?" I'm not talking about leverage against the person -- I am talking about, will you get all of the details in your head, and will you

go over it and over it and over it and over it again and never release it? Be careful of your insatiable passion to know every detail of a person who's hurt you. May not be really good for you. It may be better that you live in just a little level of naivety and lack of knowledge. Why? Because Paul says love keeps no record of wrong. Doesn't put it in the ledger. It's not a feeling, it's a command. It's not how I feel today. It's whether or not I choose to be obedient. And that's where we all have to begin. It's not easy. I'm not talking about somebody who cuts you off in the road -- I'm talking about somebody's who's wounded you deeply, cut your heart open, betrayed you. Gone back on their word. Choose not to remember.

Secondly, be willing to hand over vengeance to God. Romans chapter 12 says: "Don't repay evil for evil. Give God room to take care of vengeance." God is loving. God's merciful. Every one of us have experienced that. And I don't say this to fuel your rage, but -- God is also just. God has good memory. And my friends, be at peace. God doesn't let people get away with their junk.

One of the guys that I over my lifetime -- Dr. Vernon Grounds -- had such a privilege of knowing. He was one of the presidents for Denver Seminary. He was one of the most gracious individuals in the world. every Thursday morning, and he was a brilliant missiologist. But maybe what he did best was forgive people, love people. Back in the fifties, if you remember what was happening in some of the Baptist circles -- there was a group of what we called "fundamentalists." And let me tell you what, there was no one pure enough for them. They were a tough group of people. They would picket Dr. Grounds at Denver Seminary because he didn't come out of the right seminary, he didn't have the right degree -- his Ph.D. was in psychology -- and, this man was just the most grounded, solid, loving, loving the word of God -- but you know, sometimes people get this idea that if you aren't in their kind of, you know, if you don't walk the way they walk and went to the school that they're supposed to go to -- and they boycotted him, they picketed him, they put all kinds of garbage -- they put sugar in his gas tank. I mean, they did everything to that guy for ten, 15 years, and he never once spoke out against them.

Another dear friend of mine -- both of them now in Heaven -- Dr. Haddon Robinson -- was telling me one time of a trip he took to Florida. And there was a gentleman who came where Dr. Robinson was speaking, and he came up to him, and he said, "You know -- you're not Dr. Grounds, but somehow being the president of Denver Seminary I feel like if I confess to you, it somehow helps. I lived in Denver back in the fifties, and those were some of the darkest days of my Christian life. I was one of the pastors who continually heckled Vernon Grounds." He said, "I have lived with regret of that all my life." And when he finished with this statement -- "Can I tell you about all the men who were with me who stood up against Dr. Grounds?" Haddon asked him, he said, "Why do I need to know this?" He said, "Because the church needs to know it when you preach. When God says, 'Vengeance is mine,' he means it." And this gentleman went on to tell Dr. Robinson of all the men who stood with him to mock, to picket, to put sugar - - he said every one of them died under the judgment of God's hand.

When the Scripture says, "The faithless will be repaid for their ways and a good man rewarded for his," it's true. And when God says, "I will bring my wrath against those who come against the righteous," God means that as well. And my friends, that's why God says, "Love keeps no record of wrongs." I'll tell you why -- because it breaks you out of prison. And it keeps you from inciting the discipline of God on your life. As Dr. Robinson told me, he goes, "I'm not the judge. But," he said, "I tell you, I walked away from that conversation all the more willing to forgive any who have ever sinned against me." Because when you keep that record, when you take up that offense, when you begin to rehearse against that person, you take out of the hand of God vengeance, but it destroys you and poisons you. As it did those men. Haddon was amazed to hear man after man after man who died early, and some of them even gruesome.

Choose not to remember. And realize that you and I need to hand over to God the vengeance that we might want to pick up against people. And maybe, most importantly, if I'm going to really love people and keep no record of wrong, I've got to remember how God has forgiven me. Hebrews chapter 6 says, "God will not forgive the good works that you have shown towards your people. He does not and will not treat us according to our sins." Colossians chapter 3, verse 12, says: "Therefore, as God's dearly loved children, clothe yourselves with kindness and gentleness, and all of these things, and forgive each other, as Christ has forgiven you." Whenever I struggle with forgiveness, I always just have a little chat with God. "Would you help me have a little bit of reality therapy right now? For some reason, my forgiveness with you is escaping my notice."

When I take up, and I want to have a conversation -- I want somebody to crawl back groveling to me. I want somebody to own what they have done. Whenever that happens, I just always have a little conversation with the Father, and say, "Father, would you help remind me of the many times that you've needed to forgive me? Because somehow, if you can help remind me of that, it triggers my forgiveness towards other people." The Scripture says, "As far as east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins." Does God forget them? To be quite honest with you -- no, I don't think He does. If that's the case, then He wouldn't have remembered David's sin. He wouldn't put it in the Bible. It's not that God forgets in the sense that He has no record of it, it's that He doesn't hold it against us. And as far as east is from the west -- in fact, I was a kid -- I used to think, "Well, man, if you just keep traveling east you're gonna run into west!" But it's not true. If you keep going east, you're gonna run into what? The infinity, no end -- it's gonna go forever! And if you go true west, the same thing will happen. And what God is saying is, "As far as east is from the west, so far I have removed that guilt, I have removed that shame, I have removed all of the weight of that sin against you. Oh, dear Mark, might you find the ability through the grace of Christ to forgive this poor person who has sinned against you."

Joseph, treated horribly by his brothers -- sold into slavery. And then he sees them, and he's filled with love and forgiveness. Corrie ten Boom -- abused, family members murdered. And then she's confronted face to face with the man who did much of that. And she forgave him. Why? Love keeps no record of wrongs. Doesn't put it in the ledger it chooses. It's not a feeling, it's a choice of obedience because you understand that if I don't forgive, I will imprison myself in the resentment and the anger and the poison that will destroy every other relationship that I have.

Paul Stevens -- his daughter was stabbed by a neighbor in Evansville, Indiana. He was filled with rage. It wasn't enough that he was caught. It wasn't enough that he was put into prison. Paul would drive into his neighborhood, and he would rehearse trying to get to the man and murder him for taking his daughter. It got so much into his psyche that Paul had to take his family and move. And then he discovered the horrific reality that moving out of Indiana wasn't far enough. He moved all the way to Kentucky, but it wasn't far enough. The stain and the anger and the rage, it cycled over and over and over, and his hatred began to change his very personality. His wife said that he became literally a different person. That's what rage and anger do to you. That's what unforgiveness does. That's why Paul says love keeps no record of wrongs. It's not just because you're going to release somebody else -- it's because you release yourself.

Paul went to a retreat -- a guys' retreat. And it was there he discovered this very simple truth -- hatred had no ability to restore his daughter's life. May seem like a small statement -- to him it was a miracle. Hatred had no ability to restore his daughter's life. And so, Paul went home from that retreat, and he made a decision -- "God, somehow I have to work counterintuitively against my flesh." So, he went to a local prison, and he asked permission over time, as he developed their trust of him, to meet with the most violent of criminals in that prison in Kentucky. Twice a week he went. It didn't take very long until Paul had 24 new

friends. Some called him "Dad," some called him "Brother." Many of them called him "Mentor." He led them to Christ. He disciplined them. He cared for them.

My friends, if Paul Stevens could face down the dragon of hatred and release it; if Corrie ten Boom can face the man who abused her and murdered some of her family; and if Joseph can look his brothers in the eye and welcome them -- you can do it. You can do it. You can choose tonight, "I am gonna release someone. I'm gonna release this event. I'm gonna release this identity, and I'm no longer going to let it control me." Love keeps no record of wrongs, and my friend, because Christ is in you, you can do it. You can do it! And you will never be more free. And who knows of the beauty of how God will lead you. Maybe a story like Paul. Back into the very place of the kind of men who violated his daughter, and there he became their daddy. You can do it, because Christ is in you.

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