

Love in Action

1. Warm up: On Sunday, Pastor Robert told about the first live concert he ever attended – Stevie Wonder at Market Square Arena. Robert was in awe of Stevie’s leather bomber jacket trimmed with a white fur collar. What was the first live concert you ever attended – and your most vivid memory from that experience?
2. The lead song on Stevie Wonder’s album “Songs in the Key of Life” is “Love’s in Need of Love Today.” Explaining the meaning of the song, Wonder said, “For love to be effective, it has to be fed.” What do you think that means?
3. Stevie Wonder’s album was written in the 70’s. Although significant civil rights legislation had been enacted in the 60’s, *de facto* segregation, racism, and white resentment were still rampant. Watergate had just occurred, the Vietnam war had just ended, and inflation reached historic highs. All this gave rise to deferred dreams of progress and erosion of community spirit, feeding mistrust and selfishness.
 - a. How would you describe the mood of our present time? And what do you see as the most prominent contributing factors?
 - b. Stevie Wonder’s song says, “The force of evil plans to make you its possession, and it will if we let it.” Some Christians call this “spiritual warfare,” the idea that evil spirits and forces seek to take advantage of divisions between us, stoking chaos. Does that resonate with you? Is it consistent with your observation of life and culture?
 - c. Robert placed emphasis on racism and hate as a major problem that persists. He said, “Racism and division have been pervasive for centuries. They continue to manifest in various forms, affecting millions of lives. As a society we have made progress, but it’s not enough. The divisions between people, races and cultures persist, leading to conflict and violence.” Why are racism and cultural divisions so stubbornly endemic?
4. Sunday’s scripture passage offers a blueprint for how we, as followers of Jesus, should respond to the selfishness, hate, violence, and discrimination that pervades human interactions. Read Romans 12:9-21, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The first two verses of Romans 12 begins with these words, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The word “therefore” is significant. It refers back to everything God has done for us as described in the first 11 chapters of Romans. There Paul tells us that God came to us in the form of Jesus, died for our sins, and now offers us the opportunity to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (God’s Spirit) to empower us to live a new way of life the mirrors the genuine love and mercy of God. Do you buy that?

- Do you believe we are incapable of being genuinely good people apart from the power of God within us? Why or why not?
- b. Romans 12:11 makes a simple, but profound statement, “Love must be sincere.” There’s a big difference between sincere love and mere tolerance. Sincere love is hard! Read Josh McDowell’s quote on p. 3. What couplet in the quote most speaks to you – and why? How would you describe the difference between love and tolerance?
 - c. There’s also a big difference between sincere love and transactional “love.” Robert said transactional love is based on what you can do for me, whereas sincere love is unilateral. Tell us about a time when you’ve experienced either sincere love or transactional “love.”
5. On Sunday, Robert focused our attention on three practical ways to practice sincere love, as described in Romans 12. **First, love is an action word.** Robert said, “The biblical Greek word for love, *agape*, does not start with an emotion. It starts with a decision. Liking something starts with an emotion because it’s how you feel about it. Biblical love may or may not include emotion. That’s why God can command you to love your enemies. God is not telling you to feel good about somebody that hates you. God is talking about making a decision to compassionately, righteously, responsibly, and sacrificially seek the well-being of another.” Who’s someone in your life who needs you to love them even though you don’t like them? On a practical level, how might you express that love to them?
6. **Second, biblical love requires hope.** Verse 12 says, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” Robert said that the ability to do good to someone who needs our love, even when inconvenient or costly, is a direct result of our hope in God, *i.e.*, our belief that God can change difficult people and circumstances. Again, think about someone who needs your love even though you don’t like them. What does hope look like in that situation? What’s the hopeful outcome you believe God could achieve through you with them?
7. **Third, biblical love calls us to “overcome evil with good.”** Romans 12:21.
- a. When have you seen goodness overcome evil? If so, tell us what you saw.
 - b. At the end of “Love’s in Need of Love Today,” Stevie Wonder adlibs a line, saying, “Love is very peaceful.” Robert said, “That line cuts and bleeds; it asks you what you think you’re doing serving the opposite of love. What gives you the right to disregard the most powerful emotion on earth, the only satisfactory resolution for anything?” Think of a social ill that deeply troubles you and causes you to want to hate those who are perpetrating that evil. What is a peaceful, biblically loving way of seeking to create positive change in that area?

Romans 12:9-21

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. **11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. **12** Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **13** Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. **18** If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. **19** Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. **20** On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed them;

if they are thirsty, give them something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on their head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Josh McDowell

Tolerance says, "You must approve of what I do."

Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will love you, even when your behavior offends me."

Tolerance says, "You must agree with me."

Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will tell you the truth, because I am convinced 'the truth will set you free.'"

Tolerance says, "You must allow me to have my way."

Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will plead with you to follow the right way, because I believe you are worth the risk."

Tolerance seeks to be inoffensive;

love takes risks.

Tolerance glorifies division;

love seeks unity.

Tolerance costs nothing;

love costs everything.