

Romans 8:26-39 N.T. 148 (NRSV)

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8: 26-39 N.T. Page 148
“Inseparable”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Father God, we come away from busy lives to sit a spell and tell you that we love you. Hold us close and whisper your Word of Love into the inner recesses of our souls. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: **Not long ago I** was talking with a young woman who was clearly very happy. She told me that her new boyfriend has just told her that **he loved her.** Then she said, *“I’m feeling very good about our relationship, I know we’re secure.”* Most of us aren’t so old and jaded so as to have forgotten what it feels like when you first fall in love. You’re amazed that someone else actually loves you—warts, insecurities, and all. Nothing else quite compares to the feeling of being in love. But most of us are old enough to know that true love is more than just that initial feeling. True love must endure the test of time.

The years slip by and you grow to know each other like the back of your own hand. But as we also know, familiarity can breed contempt. There’re far too many couples who live in the same house and share the same relatives, but other than that, they live lives that are worlds apart. **No one ever intends** to end up like that. Everyone wants the fairy tale ending; everyone wants to live happily ever after. But you can’t sustain a healthy relationship on benign neglect. It takes work to maintain a relationship. But for a lot of couples it’s **as if someone has erased** the words *“I love you”* from their vocabularies. **There they sit side-by-side** on the couch in the living room staring at the TV together, but the looks on their faces are as cold as if they were two ships passing in the night. This all reminds me of **the title of a 1960’s Joan Baez/Bob Dylan song**, *“Love is just another four-letter word.”* Oh, how jaded we can become about love.

PAUSE

Move I.

All too often, we neglect to tell God that we love him. Much of the time, we live our lives as if God weren't even there. On the rare occasions when we pray, we spend most of our time complaining. We gripe about this and we gripe about that. **Not once do we pause** to look into God's face and to tell him that we love him. Prayer is supposed to be a conversation, but we never pause long enough to give God a chance to get a word in edgewise. **And when we've said our hasty Amen,** we instantly relegate God to being out of sight—out of mind. And then we wonder why we go through life feeling so spiritually empty.

Most Christians will tell you that worship is an important aspect of their faith. In fact, **according to the Barna Research Group, 92%** of Christians rank worshipping God as the most important aspect of being a Christian. Worship is the primary way that we tell God that we love him. Yet the simple reality is that the majority of Christian's neglect worshipping God. **Here in Western Pennsylvania,** there are **154,863** people who are members of United Methodist congregations, yet last year on a typical Sunday, only **45,775** of those members gathered in worship, that's only **30%**. So, I'm not exaggerating when I say that the majority of Christians are neglecting worshipping God. Fortunately, **our church** is doing a little better—but only a little. When we submitted our last annual statistic report our official membership was **282** and last year our average worship attendance was **110**, so that's **39%**. So even though we're doing better than lots of other churches, the truth is even the majority of our own members neglect worshipping God too. And as if that isn't bad enough, **some of you** who do come to worship regularly rarely sense God's presence here in worship. For some of you, most weeks you sit in your seat **and are as bored as that old couple** sitting on the couch watching TV. You don't look God in the face and tell him that you love him, because you can't tell if God's even here.

Can anyone here tell me what the greatest of God's Commandments is? (Raise hand) **Yes, in Matthew 22:37 (NRSV)** Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**" Yes, God loves us and wants us to love him with everything we've got. Now, it pains me to say this, but I think the reason that we all too often neglect to tell God that we love him, isn't that we're too busy to pray, or that our worship services aren't inspiring enough. The reason we neglect to tell God that we love him is that **we don't actually love God**. You heard me right we don't actually love God.

What we love is what God can do for us. **Our love is very self-centered.** **We love the idea** of God saving us from our sins. **We love the idea** of God reuniting us with our loved ones after we die. **We love the idea** of spending eternity in heaven where there will be no more sickness or pain. That's just like the teenager who wants the sex without the commitment. We want the benefits from God without having to have the relationship with God. Now you might think I'm being harsh, but how else can you explain why so many **Christians neglect prayer and worship?** **Yes, all too often we are neglecting to tell God that we love him.**

End I.

Move II.

But God's love for us endures forever. While we might have trouble maintaining our focus on God, God has no trouble maintaining his focus on us. God's love for us is dependable. God's love for us is steadfast. God's love for us is determined. God's love for us is certain. God's loves us with a true father's kind of love.

Our Bible lesson today is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Romans was Paul's longest letter and the one where he developed his theology most fully. At the risk of over simplifying, while the four Gospels teach us about the life and person of Jesus Christ, its Romans that teaches us about the basics of the Christian faith. You can think of Romans as being a primer to Christianity. Paul outlines how a righteous God initiates and maintains a loving relationship with fallen human beings. Paul develops the **theological concepts of grace, faith, salvation, justification, and sanctification**. In Romans Paul also gives us one of the strongest statements of the determined nature of God's love. **In Romans 5:8 (NRSV)** Paul writes, "**But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.**" When it comes to establishing a relationship with people, God's the one who takes the initiative. Long before God caught our eye, we'd already caught God's eye.

Now while I have to admit that I'm not much of a country music fan, I think God's actually country music's biggest fan. Most of the recurring themes of the Old Testament read an awful lot like a country music song. **God loves** the people of Israel, **God courts** the people of Israel, **the people of Israel** love God, but the people of Israel have **cheat'n hearts**. Time and time again, the people of Israel stray and have **one-night stands** with an assortment of seedy pagan gods. But God still loves Israel and **wants the people back**. That's the story of the Old Testament in a nutshell.

Now if Israel had cheated on us like Israel cheated on God, we'd probably do like **Carrie Underwood** and “**dig our key into the side of Israel's pretty little souped up four-wheel drive, and crave our name into Israel's legacy.**” We'd want to make Israel think twice before Israel cheated again and we'd most certainly would never want Israel back again. **But all thanks be to God, we're not God and God's not us.** No matter how many times Israel cheated, God always-wanted Israel back, but God's also working to cure Israel of her cheatin' ways, to mend her cheatin' heart. That's how determined God's love is.

There's contemporary Christian country song that speaks directly of the determination of God's love. The song is “**He Ain't the Leavin' Kind,**” by Rascal Flatts. Listen to the words of the chorus:

He ain't the leavin' kind
He'd never walk away
even from those who don't believe
and wanna leave him behind
He ain't the leavin' kind

That's the determination that God shows though his son Jesus Christ. **While we we're yet sinners, Christ died for us.** Our love may stray. **But God's love for us does endure forever.**

End II.

Move III.

And nothing can separate you from God but you. If you're feeling alienated from God, it's not because God left you. It's because you left God. If you stopped loving God, if you stopped spending time in prayer with God, if you stopped worshiping God, those are the reasons you're feeling estranged from God. **God's still where God's always been**—right by your side. God's Spirit is still busy day and night testifying with your spirit that you are God's son or daughter. The problem is that you have **turned a deaf ear** to God's Spirit. Your spirit has tuned God out and turned God off.

I frequently use the passage from our Bible lesson today as my preaching scripture at funeral services. I use this passage because of its unwavering assurance of God's enduring love. **Romans 8:28 (NRSV)** may well be the most reassuring verse in the entire Bible, **“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”** God takes even something as dark and unsettling as death and turns it into something good for everyone who loves God. **Most of you here** this morning have had first-hand experience with death. You've experience the death of your mother or father. Or you've experienced the death of your husband or wife. Or you've experienced the death of your son or daughter. **It hurts so much to have** death separate you from someone you've loved so much. That's the kind of pain God feels when any of us fail to return God's love.

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Now when most people read the comforting words of assurances found in Romans 8, they conclude that Paul says that nothing can separate us from the love of God. But we need read those words more carefully. **Listen as I read Romans 8:38-39 (NRSV), “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** That’s a very comprehensive list. It says that **no circumstance nor any external person or thing** will ever be able to take you away from your loving relationship with God. **But the one person** who can break that relationship is you. **God’s makes it clear** he wants you, **but you need to make it equally clear** you want God. A loving relationship is only a relationship when there’s love given on both sides. That’s why it’s so essential that we follow the greatest commandment and **truly love God with all of heart, soul, and mind**. You can’t be a Christian and skip the requirement to love God.

In a relationship, there’re three little words you can never say too often—“*I love you*.” As part of our worship today, you need to say those words to God. I invite you to do that with me right now as we prayerfully sing “*Father, I Adore You*” together. We’ll sing the song thru three times, once to each of three persons of the godhead: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Please hold your hands like this and look at the [Flame of Life | Christ candle] as we sing together prayerfully:

**Father, (Jesus, Spirit) I adore you,
lay my life before you;
how I love you.**

God does love you and you do love God. You both love with an inseparable love. And that mutual bond of love will endure forever. **Yes, nothing can separate you from God but you.**

End III.

Conclusion: You can't sustain a relationship on benign neglect. **Yes, all too often, we neglect to tell God that we love him.** All we care about is what God can do for us. So, when we pray all we do is complain. And when we gather in worship, we don't even believe God is here. **But God's love for us endures forever.** God always wants us back, but God does work to mend our cheatin' hearts. **And nothing can separate you from God but you.** You're the only one who can break the relationship. **Love the Lord your God** with all of your heart, soul, and mind, and the love you share with God will endure forever. You'll be **"Inseparable!"**

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. O God, our creator, redeemer, and sustainer, we love you with all of our beings. In you, and you alone, we live, and move, and have our being. **Amen!**

Closing Chorus: "*I Know Whom I Have Believed*" Hymnal No. 714
All Four Verses

Sending Forth: God is faithful to you. Will you be faithful to God? Go forth and love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and soul, and mind. You and God—you're Inseparable! **And all of God's people said...Amen!**