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Sermon Transcript: The Stapleless Stapler of Love

I have a friend who's really into Japanese stationery products. I have a lot of interesting friends. This one in particular, we've been friends ever since in third grade when I tripped him on his way to the bathroom. And now all these years later, we're still good friends. Every other week, we get on a Zoom call and talk. He lives in New York, I live here, and we stay in touch. And he's one of these curious minds that's always looking for different things and new things. And so the last couple times he was just going on and on about these different amazing Japanese stationery products.

What happens is that whenever we talk, I end up Googling things in the middle of our conversation. He'll be like, "You should look that up. You should look that up, Rob." I'm like, "Okay." So while we're on the call, I'm looking stuff up. But I don't know if you know this, but if you search on stuff, our AI and computer overlords are paying attention and then it just starts feeding you. It's like the internet has said, "Oh, Rob, you're interested in Japanese stationery products. Let me show you every video you didn't know existed." So, for the past couple weeks, that's what I've been getting is all these other little extra videos on YouTube or things sent to me, advertisements now. And then I saw something and I had to buy it. It worked. It worked.

This little marvel of the universe is a stapleless stapler. Right? Already you're thinking, "That's voodoo black magic. Don't do that, pastor." But you just take this thing right here with these two sheets of paper. You put them together in there, and now it's held together without a staple. I handed out several copies of this. If I gave one of these to you, take a look, inspect it, and then pass it around so others can see this marvel of innovation that's before you. How does it work? Yeah. What's that? Oh, it can actually hold 10 pages. Yeah.

I feel like I'm starting an infomercial. How much would you pay for a product like this? Huh? How much? Free shipping and handling! Honestly, if you give me 20 bucks, I'll buy it for you because it costs less than that. Who knew such a marvel existed? And honestly, even when I described to you that it cuts out a little tab and then cuts a little slit and then it tucks the tab into the slit, your mind can barely comprehend what's going on inside that little device. Keep passing it around. It's fine. I know you all pass notes during the sermon anyway; you might as well do something I asked for. So, even when I describe it to you, you kind of have to experience it. You kind of have to look at it. You kind of have to have it be real in your hands to get your head around it.

The Heart, the Soul, and the "Very"

In Deuteronomy, Moses is trying to bring together the law—all the commandments, all the ordinances that have been given to the people—in a way that they can hold on to it, a way that it'll stay together, in a way to connect their identity of who they are with the life-giving law that's been given to them. And it's so important that right here at the beginning he gives this summary statement. He gives this commandment. And it's such an essential commandment given to the people that centuries later, when Jesus is asked by the leaders, "What is the greatest commandment?" he recites this verse: that you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might. And they don't question that. They said, "You nailed that one. You're absolutely right," because they understood that as a fundamental way to capture all that the law meant, all of what

God's direction meant.

It all comes out of you loving God with all that you have. And this is an important commandment that should be repeated in your household. Heck, draw it on your doorways if you have to. Smack it on your forehead if you have to. Whatever you need to do, you need to know this. Jesus just pulled a little magic trick when he did it and said, "Oh, and let me grab this one verse of Leviticus and slide it in there that says, 'And love your neighbor as yourself.'" And he said, "All of the law hangs on those two commandments."

This starts off by simply saying, "Israel, listen. Listen, Israel, listen. The Lord our God is Lord alone." There's no one else. There's nothing else that deserves your loyalty or your praise or the efforts of your life. You need to understand this God is God alone. Make nothing else in place of that. And then it says this is how you express that. This is how you live that: that you love this God with all your heart. And when they say heart, it's not just with all the feels, right? For the Hebrew people, when they say heart, they saw this as not just the seat of your feelings but the seat of your intellect as well. So with all your thinking and your feeling, love God.

And then we translate "with all your soul." It's really a word called *nephesh*. It means all the "livingness" of you. All the stuff in you that makes you different than a non-living object. It's all the living stuff of you is that word there. And to use that, with all of that, that you love God.

Finally, that you love the Lord your God with all your might. And the actual word there in the language is with all of your "very." It's the word for very, like when we say "very good," but it's never used as a noun anywhere else in the Bible. But there, the one time in the Hebrew scriptures, they use it as a noun. You shall love the Lord your God with all your "very."

The Experiment: Loving with Your "Very"

I remember my Hebrew professor talking about this passage and saying how one night—this is an example of good motherhood on Mother's Day to give to you—his wife had this great idea. "How about we just let our son stay up as late as he wants to tonight and see what happens?" Well, he was game, so they went ahead and did it and they let him go ahead and stay up just as late as he wanted to. He's only like three years old at this time, you know, and he actually got almost all the way till midnight before he was just starting to crash out. And he's like, "I think I'm going to go to bed now."

So the little boy started going up the stairs to the bedroom. But don't worry, they're good parents; they stood behind, right? Because he's staggering up the stairs. And he gets up to the top. He gets to the top floor and he starts staggering down the hallway. He gets like three or four steps and he drops to his knees and he tries to walk on his knees and then he finally falls forward. He's on all fours. He's crawling to his bedroom. At this moment, you're thinking, why don't they just pick him up? I don't know. They were running an experiment. Okay. And he kept going. And then when he's just about three or four feet away from his bedroom, he just collapsed right there in the middle of the hallway.

As they reached down to pick him up, just before they got their hands next to him, his one arm came up like this, and it reached out one last time. And my Hebrew professor said that that's loving the Lord your God with all your "very." That's your "very." It's the last little bit that you have to give in this world. That's your "very." That's your might. And will you love the Lord your God with all of that? Because if you do, then things will go right. Not that it goes perfect, but that it goes right. And that you find yourself in the safer, more beautiful, more good places in this world.

A Love You Didn't Know was Possible

I'm telling you that God's love is like a stapleless stapler. Because for many of you, you didn't know you needed this in your life. And for many of you now that you've seen it, you're thinking, "I need this

in my life. I've seen what it can do." And that's why it's so important the rest of these verses of what was shared, which is that yes, you love the Lord your God and then you tell these things to the next generation and you repeat them and you make them a point of discussion and you show people. Because when we show them in both word and deed what this love is about and that we're willing to give so much of ourselves to it, it has an impact on others.

The law is not just a bunch of rules to keep you from having fun. The law of God, the direction that we have in scriptures, is to keep us in a relationship of love. The greatest commandment is that you love God. Second to it, says Christ, is that you love one another. It's love. It's love which is that action of our faith that's essential. It's what parses through all of the rulemaking and the things that would block people from being open to what God has for them.

But the question comes down to: How much are you willing to set aside the other gods of your life? How much are you willing to take the other loves of your life and bring them down a notch and make God the one who receives the fullness of what you can give? And look, are you going to be able to give all your heart, all your soul, and all your might in loving God? No. You're going to mess it up again and again, just like we do with each other.

And that's where through grace we're given what is perhaps the greatest expression of this love. This love that goes above our own will, that goes above our own understanding. And that is the love that comes through forgiveness. But that forgiveness then asks you to try again. It's not just a pass. And so we continue as the people of God to try to love.

What a good mother, what a good parent, what a good mentor and guide in life will do is they will help you to take what you know as your identity of who you are and connect it with love. And you are a beloved member of God's family. When we love one another using that fuel of our love for God, that's when we can reveal it most clearly. And someone's going to see it. And they didn't know it was even possible. They didn't even know that life could be like that. That's the kind of love that we want to express in this church family and to every person who walks through those doors—and then for every person that encounters you out there in the wild, Monday through Saturday—that they might experience a love that they didn't know was possible.

It's like a stapleless stapler. Joe, you didn't know it was possible, did you? And there it is. And so, go out and seek to bring together the identity of who you are with the knowledge of God's love. And in that, we prepare ourselves to be the people of God. It's what Moses wanted for the people then. It's what Christ wants for you now.

Hallelujah. Amen.