

## Discipleship series

### Love – The measure of spiritual maturity

Newspaper columnist and minister George Crane tells of a wife who came into his office full of hatred toward her husband. "I do not only want to get rid of him, I want to get even. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he has me."

Dr. Crane suggested an ingenious plan "Go home and act as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Spare no efforts to please him, to enjoy him. Make him believe you love him. After you've convinced him of your undying love and that you cannot live without him, then drop the bomb. Tell him that you're getting a divorce. That will really hurt him." With revenge in her eyes, she smiled and exclaimed, "Beautiful, beautiful. Will he ever be surprised!" And she did it with enthusiasm. Acting "as if." For two months she showed love, kindness, listening, giving, reinforcing, sharing. When she didn't return, Crane called. "Are you ready now to go through with the divorce?"

"Divorce?" she exclaimed. "Never! I discovered I really do love him." Her actions had changed her feelings. Motion resulted in emotion. The ability to love is established not so much by fervent promise as often repeated deeds.

**J. Allan Petersen.**

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

#### 1) The Jesus type of love

- Jesus showed love and compassion in various ways including feeding the hungry, healing the sick, showing that he valued woman, children and the downtrodden – the outcasts of society
- However, His ultimate act of love was demonstrated on the cross where He didn't only suffer physical pain on our behalf, but was subjected to the full weight of the wrath of God that was meant for us as all of our sins were placed on Him and He also suffered the agony of separation from the Father for the first time ever.
  - Isaiah 53:5-6 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
  - Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- The aspect of love that I want to focus on is relational love
  - Jesus' love wasn't only compassionate and sacrificial, but was also relational
  - We can be so mechanical in sacrificing ourselves for others in various ways that we could be missing the relational aspect of it and so not doing it out of love at all
  - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.
- Jesus' incarnation in itself was an act of love
  - He left His world to enter the world of others to identify with us without losing His own identity
  - Loving as Jesus loved us means that we leave our comfort zones to enter into the world of another for their benefit, expecting nothing in return, that they may be loved
- Loving relationship is the measure of our spiritual maturity. It's the foundation on which everything else is built
  - Matthew 22:37-40 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

## 2) Connecting with people

- We should not confuse love with compassion and mercy.
  - Although you can show compassion and mercy without loving someone, you can't love someone without showing compassion and mercy
  - If someone asks for food you show compassion by giving them food although you don't love them
- Love is about connectivity, not merely about what you do for people, but how you connect with them
  - You might give someone your time to listen to them, but if you're distracted while they're talking to you, they won't feel loved and valued.
- Some ways we show love by maintaining connectivity with people as adapted from a list by Peter Scazzero
  - We often focus on what we want to say next when listening to people. Love focuses on what they're saying to understand them better
  - We pass people in a building without greeting them, especially when we're busy. Love puts people before admin and preparations, but know your limits
    - Story of Rick Warren and one of his co-pastors who walked past everyone in the parking lot without greeting because he had a lot of walk to do
    - People are your work
  - We make social judgment calls about people looking at their ethnicity, economic status, where they work, etc. Love looks beyond the social aspects of a person and values the person regardless of their social standing or status
  - We want to correct people when they express faulty views about God and faith. Love first tries to understand why they hold those views and only corrects the person after understanding where they're come from. Then the correction is done with love and gentleness and not harshness
  - We often say we love people but are really using them to accomplish our own goals. When they don't tow the line by not turning up at meetings, etc. we get angry with them, not because we care about them, but because they're not meeting our expectations for our goals to be met. Love cares for the person first and foremost and not about their personal goals. If they miss a meeting the concern is for the wellbeing of the person and not anger at their goals not being met.
- We all make judgment calls on people, but love isn't judgmental
  - John 7:24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

## 3) Being transformed to love

- True godly love doesn't come naturally to us as we are by nature self-centered.
  - Luke 6:32-35 If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.
- To love with a godly love is a work of grace and the Holy Spirit in our lives
- God also orchestrates our circumstances putting difficult and disagreeable people in our lives so that that we can learn to love the unlovable.
- We need humility to be transformed to love because it's often a humbling experience to learn to love the unlovable
  - However, it's even more humbling when we see some unlovable traits in our own lives and know that there are others that love us nevertheless
  - Sometimes we may even hear a truth about ourselves from someone we really don't like or completely disagree with; it takes humility to accept that truth regardless of the source of it.