

“Loving Like Jesus Loves Me”
40 Days of Love, Week 2
John 13:1-17, 34-35, Eph. 3:14-19
February 28, 2010

Welcome back to *40 Days of Love!* Today is day 15, so by now, you should have read through the first 14 days of readings in our study book, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*. I also hope you are discussing that material with your LIFE Group or attending one of our two Adult Ed classes on Sunday mornings. If you're not, it's not too late! Join the discussion at 9:30 or 11 a.m. It's really great material. We're training to become Olympic-class lovers during this study—gold medal winners in love. My goal for us is that we will all have better relationships and become more loving people—not just for these 40 days, but for the rest of our lives.

And of course, our model, our example, is Jesus. In our reading from John's gospel, it's the night before the crucifixion, though the disciples don't know that, of course. They've just shared what we commonly call 'the Last Supper.' What Jesus does next must have seemed unthinkable to them. Jesus gets up from the table, wraps a towel around His waist, takes a basin of water, and begins to go around the circle of His disciples, washing their feet. John 13:12-15. Now, Jesus is not commanding the practice of footwashing for His followers, per se. The footwashing was symbolic of the way Jesus would serve them and sacrifice for them on the cross. It was a metaphor for the way He would show them the full extent of His love. Jesus deserved respect as their Teacher and honor and obedience as their Lord. They should have been washing *His* feet. But instead, *He served them* as the lowest household slave would do. And He commanded us to be willing to do the same for one another.

And then a bit later, He speaks those words we've come to call 'the New Commandment.' John 13:34-35. Three times in two verses Jesus repeats this simple command: Love one another. What's 'new' about that? Jesus has already made it clear that love is to be the main thing, the highest value, the dominant principle of life. "Love God" and "love your neighbor" are what Jesus called the greatest commandments in all the Law. So what's 'new' about this "new command" to "love one another"? Well, what's 'new' is not the 'love' part. And it's not the 'one another' part. What's 'new' is defined by two very small but very significant little words: Circle "As I." "*As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*" Those two little words change this whole game of love. It's not *what* we are commanded to do, but *how* we are commanded to do it that's new. I am to love others as Jesus loves me. *In the same way* that Jesus loves me, I am to love you.

Let's take a look at three ways we can love people *as Jesus* has loved us. The first is this: I must: 1. Accept others like Jesus accepts me. You know, we talk a lot about "accepting Jesus." Sometimes we ask, "Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?" And that is a crucial decision. If you have not decided to make Jesus the Leader of your life and acknowledged Him as the Forgiver of your sins, you need to take care of that. But have you ever realized that before you ever accepted Him, He accepted *you*? Maybe you consider yourself to be a Christian, maybe you've been a Christ-follower all your life, but you've never really felt accepted by God. Some people feel like God's always judging and criticizing everything they do. That no matter what they do, it's not good enough in God's eyes. Sometimes that comes from growing up with

parents who are never satisfied with who you are or what you achieve. And since we call God 'Father,' we think He is like our human parents. Even today as an adult you may still be trying to win the approval, the acceptance, of impossible-to-please parents.

If this is you, please get this today: You don't have to do that with God. If you don't get anything else out of this whole series, please get this: God accepts and loves you just the way you are. He knows everything about you. *Everything*. The stuff that you would just die if anybody else knew about you, God knows. And He loves you anyway. You know, I suspect that every one of us in this room has experienced love. The great majority of the love we will ever experience is love that comes with strings attached, conditions, the 'I love you if's.' The 'I love you because's.' If you look right, if you live in the right place, if you succeed. Because you do what I ask you. Because you make me happy. The love we are talking about and studying in this series, the love of Jesus Christ, it has no conditions, it has no if's, it has no because's.

The love of God expressed in Jesus Christ is "I love you anyway" love. Because it's not based on us at all. It's based on the fact that Jesus chose to love us just the way we are. Listen: There is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less. Regardless of what you do or don't do, God loves you anyway. God accepts you anyway. See, God says, "I don't love you because of who *you* are but because of who *I* am. I don't love you because of what *you do*, but because of *what I've done*. I don't love you because of your conduct, but because of my character." When Jesus says, "*As I have loved you* so you must love one another," that means that we have to learn to love the way that God loves us. God says, "I love you anyway. I love you unconditionally. I will always accept you." And that's the way we must love others. We must not love one another *if or because*. We must love like God loves: Anyway. Unconditionally. We must accept one another like God accepts us: Anyway. Unconditionally.

Now, let me be clear: there is a difference between *accepting* someone and *approving* of their behavior. This is huge. This is key. God *always* accepts you. But He certainly does not always *approve* of your behavior. But even when He does not approve of your behavior, He accepts you anyway. He loves you anyway. You can accept someone without approving of what they do. You can accept someone without approving of their lifestyle. God says, "I accept you unconditionally. I don't approve of everything you do but I accept you unconditionally and I love you." And God says, "I want you to do that with everybody in your life."

Take a look at [Romans 15:7](#) on your sermon sheet: "*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.*" He says you are to do for other people what Jesus has done for you. You are to love them *anyway*. You are to accept them *anyway*.

So let's get really concrete, really practical now. On your sermon notes sheet you'll see that we're going to give you several action steps to help you practice 'anyway love' for your homework this week. The first action step says, "This week I will show acceptance to..." I want you to write the name of somebody specific on that line. Somebody who really irritates you. [If they're sitting in your row, please don't look at them.] Or somebody who is hard to love. Don't write down a family member – you can work on somebody in your family too, but for this week,

choose somebody outside your family. Choose somebody that you have a hard time accepting. These are what we call EGR people: Extra Grace Required.

Got somebody? Okay, secondly, loving like Jesus loves me means I must: 2. Value others like Jesus values me. Do you know that you are infinitely valuable to God? I know you may not *feel* very valuable, but you are. Your value is not based on what you do for a living or on how much work you do in the church or on how much money you give away to help people. You are valuable because God created you. You are valuable because Jesus died for you. You are valuable because, if you are a believer in Jesus, God put His own Spirit within you. That's how valuable you are to God.

Jesus said this in Luke 12:6-7: "*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? [In other words they're not very valuable.] Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. [He says God even notices common little sparrows!] 'Indeed, the very hairs of your head [including the ones that fell out in the sink this morning] are all numbered! Don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.'*" God says you are not just *acceptable*, you are *valuable*. Everything God made He values. You are so valuable He sent His Son to die for your sins. You are so valuable that He exchanged Jesus' life for your life. Jesus says, "I don't just love *you* that way, I love *everybody* that way. Even the people you can't stand. So I expect you, if you're my child, to love these people the same way I love them."

So here's your action step: *This week, I will affirm the value of.....* Write in somebody's name there who has low self esteem. Someone who maybe others treat like they don't matter. Because remember: they matter to God. People matter to God. All people. And so they must also matter to us. Write down a name there, or maybe somebody you cross paths with everyday but you don't even know their name. Somebody whose value you can affirm this week. Just because they matter to God.

The third way to love like Jesus this week: I must 3. Forgive others like Jesus forgives me. Now we're talking about a giant step up in being a genuine lover. Because I know that some of you right now are picturing somebody you just think you could never forgive. But God never asks us to do something we cannot do. That would just be cruel. I know that you may truly believe you cannot forgive that person. And you may even believe that they do not deserve your forgiveness. That it would be wrong for you to forgive them. They may get God's forgiveness, but they're not getting yours. If this is you, the problem is in what you think forgiveness really is.

Listen to me very carefully: Forgiving is not forgetting. Forgiving is not excusing. Forgiving does not mean you have to be friends with that person ever again. Forgiveness means you let it go: You let go of your bitterness and resentment and desire for revenge. Have a look with me at Col. 3:13 [NLT].

See, some people think that God may forgive others, but He could never forgive them. They think that no matter what they do, whenever they have a problem, they think God is punishing them. I heard this week about a guy who everything went wrong in his life. On one day his wife walked out on him, his kid got suspended from school for drugs, he got fired, and he smashed up his car. So he gets out of his car and he looks up to heaven and he says, "Why me, God? Why

me? Why me?" And He hears this voice from heaven that says, "Because some people just tick me off!"

Is that the way God really responds to us? Of course not. God does not carry grudges. All the punishment for all the stuff you've done wrong, Jesus Christ took on the cross. You don't have to pay for it. Jesus paid for it. In fact, you *can't* pay for it. You could never pay for it, that's why Jesus had to die to pay for your sins so you could be forgiven. So if we're going to love one another *as Jesus* has loved us, God says, "I want you to learn to forgive others."

This is probably the hardest one of these three. Mostly because we don't get forgiveness. We have a really hard time believing that God could really forgive us. But the Bible says: Isa. 43:25 [GN]: "I am the God who forgives your sins, and I do this because of who I am. I will not hold your sins against you." That's who God is: God wants to forgive. Romans 8:1. "No condemnation." Circle 'no.' Not a little bit of condemnation. Not only condemnation for the really big sins. *No* condemnation because of what Jesus did. If you think that your sins are somehow unforgiveable, well, you're going to have to decide whether or not you think what God says in the Bible is true. Because He says that He will forgive you and He says that Jesus took the condemnation that I should have had to experience. And He took yours. And because of that, we are completely forgiven.

And because of that, we have to be willing to offer forgiveness and 'no condemnation' to others. Who is there this week that you could forgive, that you could offer forgiveness to? It might be somebody who has hurt you. It might be somebody that you have been hurt by and you go to them and say, "I've not talked to you for a long time. Let's reconnect." Or it might be somebody that you know who is just under a burden of guilt in their lives. They're just hurting. You just need to let them know that God has forgiven them just like He's forgiven you. Write their name down then make plans this week to let them know about God's forgiveness.

You know, Jesus didn't say, "Love one another the best you can." He said, "Love one another, as I have loved you." We are not to compare our loving to the way others love. The standard is Jesus. The model, the example, is Jesus. We are to compare our loving to the way Jesus loved and love like that. Ouch! How can I possibly ever hope to love others that way? It seems an impossibly high standard. You cannot learn it from a book or a sermon series. Jesus set the bar so high that the only way it could be reached was by living and thinking in an entirely new way.

The only way that you will even *want* to love others the way God commands is if you know God's love for you. I mean really know—to your toes—how much God loves you: personally, intimately, unconditionally. Maybe more than anything else, this is my desire for us all, dear ones. It has been my desire since I came here 12 years ago and it continues to be the desire of my heart and I hope, the focus of my ministry: that we would *know*. Most of you know that this will be my last Sunday here for a while. My sabbatical begins tomorrow. Over these next five months, please know that I will miss you all very much. Please know that I will pray for you each and every day.

And more than anything else, this is my prayer: Eph. 3:14-19 This is the key: that we would be rooted and established in love. That God's love would be the soil in which we are planted, from

which we get our nutrition. That our roots would grow down deep into God's love so that we could love one another. And that we would have power to understand, power to grasp—not on our own, but together with the saints, the people of God, the church—how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. And to somehow know this unknowable love, this crazy love that God has for us. Because even though it is unknowable, God has made it possible for us to know. He has made it possible through Jesus.

That we would become known as the church of love. The church where people—*all* kinds of people—really accept and value and forgive one another. The church where people are so filled up with God's love that it just spills out everywhere they go. So that people come to know what we know: that God is, God loves, and God can be found and known. And lives will be changed. And families and neighborhoods and schools and workplaces will be changed. And even the world will be changed.

Because of love.