



How to Be Loving

1 Peter 1:22

Now that you've cleaned up your lives by following the truth, love one another as if your lives depended on it. —1 Peter 1:22 (MSG)

We are exposing ourselves in this series, to what the Bible says about love. If you know anything about God, then you probably know that God is a “God of Love.” We saw that last week. So it shouldn't surprise you that God has a lot to offer to us about love. He is the “love doctor.”

If the Gospel (good news) means anything it means that we don't have to be the person that we used to be. *In fact, the gospel is the power within us that allows us to become what we would not be if the gospel wasn't within us.* In fact if you can look back on your life, say for the last two years, and cannot see where you have changed, I'd have to wonder what gospel it is that you believed.

And if you can't think of anything that needs to be changed, come see me and I'll tell you some of them...

And one of the things that changes in us is that God gives us more of the supernatural ability to love each another. (**Romans 5:5** *...because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*) He wants to produce love in you and through you.

And love is what he wants the church to produce, isn't it? **John 13:34-35** “*...By this (Jesus says) all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

And our key verse today comes from **1 Peter 1:22**, from The Message version: *Now that you've cleaned up your lives by following the truth, love one another as if your lives depended on it.* —1 Peter 1:22 (MSG)

Have you ever had your doctor ever say to you, “Do this because your life depends on it!” If he/she has, I'm pretty sure that you took it pretty seriously!

As the verse states, our lives do depend upon love. “Living” depends on love. You may exist...but if you're not loving, you're not living, you're just existing.

- Is love a feeling or an action?
(Is love a noun or a verb?)
- Do we act loving in order to feel loving, or do we feel love and then act on it?

Our loving actions validate our love.

There is a power of love that is so great, but you can only know it when you choose to respond, you choose to react, in obedience to God, rather than obedience to your own self-will.

What I want to do today is give you four:

Life-Giving-Qualities that Love Creates Within Us:

1. Love Gets Us INVOLVED.

A financially successful businessman wrote this, “I've had a massive blind spot all the years about things emotional. Because I'd never experienced intimacy with my own feelings and I never have felt sensitivity to other peoples feelings. As a child my family was cold, and I decided that touching, loving and hugging that other kids experienced was just for weaklings and babies. I couldn't see the value of taking an extra moment for someone's birthday or anniversary or buying flowers or just celebrating a job well done, or just listening to someone as a way of connecting with them. It didn't seem important. Frankly, I don't know how to do those things. I wasn't aware of my emotional side of my personal life. I lived my life “doing,” so I wouldn't have to feel.”

The reality is that there are some of us in this room today that can identify with these words. Maybe from childhood like this man, or perhaps

something happened that may you bitter and now you're hiding from your pain.

I probably don't have to tell you that that kind of distancing from people, that kind of wall building, that kind of emotional numbness, is not living. That's why I said that "loving is living".

On the other hand, love tells us it's okay to feel. It's okay to get involved, even though there's always a risk in getting involved. Because we can only know some things by loving them. And by necessity, loving means getting involved with them.

You can read about being compassionate, (you can do a word study from your Bible, you can do a literature search, a doctoral dissertation, on being compassionate) but until you get involved, - until you go places like the Dominican Republic or Honduras to help someone. Until you actually do something about a problem, you'll never really feel it or know it; love and compassion must always have a face attached to it.

If you don't get involved, you can never fully have this great gift of love for others, particularly those different than yourself. And *yours* will be the life that is impoverished.

Here's a secret. When people go on a mission trip, when I want us to send our youth to a Muslim City or Dominican Republic, **WHEN I WANT YOU TO GET INVOLVED IN SOMETHING LIKE THIS**, a big part of why I want you to do it is for **YOURSELVES**. Now, I know that the people we go to serve need and appreciate what we do, but we, more importantly, need compassionate hearts, and that's how you get them.

Of course mission trips don't have to be across the border, they can be right in Manchester or Hartford. In fact, they could be in the next aisle right here in church.

Now I did not love Spanish people, but when I go to their church services or attend their birthday parties, I found that I love them so much more.

Love gives us involved, and once we were involved our loves grows, and then we get more involved. And then we *start living* and Peter was right. Your lives depend upon it.

- ACTION: Open up to one another in God's church (have you invited someone you met in church to your home, or to eat together?)

- ACTION: Have you joined a small group?

2. Love Sees Through Our LABELS (and differences).

Jesus loved EVERYONE! He loved the hated Samaritan woman at the well. He loved tax collectors, He loved the Pharisees. In fact, it seemed like Jesus made it a point to demonstrate love by loving people who were not easy or popular to love.

He told passionate stories about loving such people. He told about a prodigal son who was cold and rebellious -who was loved, he told about a man beaten to a pulp and the only one to help (and love) was a Samaritan. Jesus loved the little children. He touched lepers and healed them. Jesus specialized in loving the unlovely or the different.

Whether we want to admit it or not, there is a tendency for us to put labels on people. Like a designer puts labels on clothing. And then there's subtle temptation to let those labels tell us who people are and what they're worth.

For example, if we value intelligence; in children, we can label them fast learners or slow learners. And when we meet someone's child we start asking how are they doing in school?

We value money and we label people as wealthy or poor, and then when we meet people we are asking ourselves how much they have.

Or if we value beauty, we start labeling people as attractive or unattractive.

Now it's true, on a relative scale, some people are poor, and some are intellectually slower and, let's be honest, some are uglier than others. *But love allows us to see past the labels of those that we deem unlovely.*

And in fact, there's only one label that counts. And that is the label that we all have in common.

Rich or poor, attractive or unattractive, regardless of our race, or where we live, on planet earth there is only really one label that counts. It applies to all of us. Do you know what it is? It's found in Romans 3:23 and says "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" We have all missed the mark. That is to say from God's perspective, I am fallen and I am no better than the person who wears the worst label that I can imagine.

My favorite definition of evangelism is “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”

Galatians 3:28-29 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

- But it takes love to break through the barriers and to recognize the differences and to appreciate them.
- ❖ I was struck when our missionaries, Ryan and Kristen Parker, spoke of how Americans take such little interest in foreigners in their midst. while in other countries the nationals love to learn about foreigners and get to know them.
- Love to us to see through a labels and differences

3. Love Sees Through Our INSECURITIES.

Because we all have insecurity, when we get around people we don’t know, or who we want to impress, we often think of ourselves first and foremost.

You meet new people. You start asking yourself these questions: Are these people going to like me? Are they going to notice me? Are they going to like what I am going to share? Or, are they going to think that I’m ridiculous?”

And as long as I keep thinking about how I will come across to others, I will invariably miss what’s going on with them. Do you get the picture? There are at least two ways that love helps me see people through the filter of my insecurities.

(For some of us the filter is larger and thicker, for some we may have worked on it and made it thinner.)

1. Love gives us a growing power to love ourselves enough to be thankful for who we are, and to forgive ourselves for who we’re not.

Now I feel this positive love for myself at varying degrees - but on my better days I feel that enough to get myself off my own anxieties in order to focus on what’s going on with other people. Can you imagine what our world would be like if we could get our anxieties off of ourselves and our insecurities to

focus on others? And serving each other? That’s quite a concept.

2. Love helps me get outside of myself long enough to discover that the people whose favor I need so much are as weak and needy as I am.

I don’t care who they are, how powerful they are, how wealthy they are, how attractive they are -- they have needs just like I do. And they’re trusting me to care about them, while I’m struggling to see them through the haze of my own insecurities. And I can get outside of my own uneasiness, and I can see their needs, only to the extent that I love myself for who I am and forgive myself for what I’m not.

- Some of us, maybe through a terrible hurt or disappointment, have become crippled. You have never dealt with your own pain and you can’t love (any more) because you don’t love yourself anymore.

4. Love Helps us See Through Our RIGHTS

Success in life does not come from commanding and obtaining our own rights. Success in life is measured in how many people get served as a result of our life.

And the key to “continuing and long-term” service to others is love.

Frequently we achieve this love by the forfeiture of our rights. That’s the context of the letter Paul writes to the church in Corinth. The church had deprived him of a right that he had, specifically to be paid for his work. But to teach them he did what mature people almost always do. He gave up his right for the greater good, and he writes:

1 Corinthians 9:12 *If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.*

Later in the chapter he tells us WHY he laid aside his rights, he says,

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 *To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

When you love others you always get a blessing. Jesus said, “**you need to lose your life if you want to gain it.**” You give up your old life that’s gone astray and you get a new life. But you’ve got to give it up first.

Maybe someone has deprived you of the right that you thought you deserved. Maybe they have stolen something from you. Maybe not something physical, but they stole something emotional from you, or they misunderstood your motives. Or, in some other way they deprived you of something that you deserved.

And the result was that you started foster a festering bitterness. And you didn’t forgive because they didn’t deserve to be forgiven.

But what you didn’t count on is that those emotions of bitterness and anger have a “spillover effect.” They don’t remain specific to the relationship in which they started. Bitterness and anger are such powerful influences that once they fill up your heart they infiltrate ALL your relationships to one degree or another. And they deprive you of life. They make you a different person.

In fact sometimes people will say when they reflect on the behavior that that they are not particularly proud of, they say “*I don’t know why I did not, that’s not like me.*” Listen. That IS you. Because you are responsible for what you put in your heart, and what you put in your heart determines the kind of person you end up being. Jesus said “**out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.**”

So the wall that you built up to protect yourself from ever being hurt again also keeps you from entering into a fulfilling loving relationships with anyone else.

Spiritually speaking, a heart not filled with love is one that is not alive. You cannot give away what you do not have. And if that’s not what’s in your heart, you can’t give it away to anyone.

It’s like going to the kitchen cabinet wanting to make something, but the ingredient is not there.

When you enter into a relationship and you want to give love and you look into your heart and you’ve filled it up with bitterness, rage and unforgiveness, it’s simply not there to give to anyone, no matter how much you want to.

Think of it in a literal sense. No matter how much you might like to, you can’t give someone \$1 million if you don’t have it.

What would make you think that you could get pure and accepting love from a pure and accepting heart, if you don’t have either? That would mean giving away something that you don’t have, and you can’t give away something that you don’t have.

If what has filled your heart is contaminated, if growing within it is a cancer of hatred, anger and resentment, then that is what will issue forth from you. Into every single relationship that you have.

- That’s the heart that you will then have to offer to your children, your spouse, your parents, your brothers, sisters and your church.
- Hatred, anger and resentment change who you are and they prevent you from being able to give to those that you love what you want them to have.

In contrast to that is the **POWER OF LOVE**. Love is a life-giving force. Remember, Peter says living depends on it. Love gets us out of our prison, breaks down the walls, allows us to forfeit our rights when we need to, extends forgiveness to unworthy people.

[Check out this video - a true story...VIDEO]

Reality - he would have never shared the life-changing Gospel, if he had first not **in obedience to God and act in Love, rather than obedience to his own self-will.**

Love gets us involved, It allows us to see through labels, our own insecurities and rights. AND THE WORLD IS CHANGED! (SO ARE WE)

Love can make a brand-new person out of us. Listen, that is the good news of the gospel. You don’t have to be the same old you. Maybe that’s why the Bible says

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.—1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)