

Session 3: Loving Well—Loving Others Out of the Fullness of Christ’s Love

Introduction:

This weekend we have been in John 15 primarily. We have learned that

- 1) Jesus desires for us to remain in His love—a love which is beyond any of our comprehensions as to the breadth, depth and height. It is a love like no other.
- 2) Abiding, dwelling and remaining in Him is our source for life, well-being, and fruitfulness (Abide in Me, and I in you for apart from Me you can do nothing.”)
- 3) If our deepest longings for love are met by abiding in His love, then we can love others from that straight up position...not bending into others to “make us okay”; we come to relationships with love to give away...not empty hearts that are so hungry for love that we will compromise our values, or battle desires to control others so that we get the love we desire in the package that we desire it to come to us.

I have been praying for the past 25 years off and on for God to teach me how to “Love Well”. All of us are put in positions where we see that our love is not enough...our way of loving insufficient. What does it look like ...

- to love those that sin repeatedly and often unrepentantly?
- How do we love those who are exhibiting the character qualities of a fool?
- Or what about those whose intent toward us is to harm us? What does love look like in these relationships?

Scripture: John 15

I. We need to recognize that we cannot bear the fruit of loving others well apart from abiding in Christ.

- *“John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”*
 - What is the fruit Jesus is talking about here: Paul answers this question in Galatians chapter 5 when he says:
 - *Galatians 5:22-23*
 - *But the Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

B. #1 on that list is love!!

II. Whenever we are trying to answer to question of “how do I love this person?” We have to first be willing to look at our own hearts.

Mario Bergner: “Because God assured me early in my prayer life of His love for me, I began to trust Him to show me all that my heart really contained.” Setting Love In Order

So often when we are dealing with a challenging relationship where we are confused about what it looks like to “love well” we are prone to look at the others’ sin against us. Yet we are instructed to first look at our own heart. The plank (or log) in our own eye:

How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye. Matthew 7:4

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Early in my marriage, Bob (my husband) asked me the question: “Why is it so hard for you to say the words, “I was wrong?” I always wanted to flip it back on him...” I did this because you did that!” I learned what I believed about being wrong (my plank)...to me it meant I was bad...there was something wrong with me! Which was a lie...being wrong isn't about being defective or bad...it's simply about *not being right in that instance*. Once I was aware of that belief, I was able to more freely admit when I was wrong. I was free to admit when I had sinned against him. I was free to ask for forgiveness for my part even if he did not ask forgiveness for his part. I had to deal with that plank in my own eye and deal with one of the ways I was filtering my conversation with others.

If we are going to love well, we have to be willing to look at our own sin before we can start pointing out another's sin.

III. Loving out of Fullness Rather than Empty Need

1. Am I coming to the relationship Full rather than empty trying to suck the love, acceptance, approval, value, and significance that I need from those around me.
2. Am I teaching Sunday school so that I can get the approval of others or become some child's favorite teacher ...or because I have Christ's love that I want to share? Do I need my kids to act and behave a certain way so that I feel good about myself as a parent or because I truly desire the best for them? Do I need my husband or boyfriend to get me a thoughtful Valentines Day gift so I feel special and loved? Do I react to my parents approval of another sibling with jealousy because they appear to value that sibling more than they value me?
3. Going back to the deepest needs and longings of our heart—being loved deeply for who we are with all our flaws. When I am frustrated with someone for not loving me the way I desire to be loved, I take the need and longing to God. I bathe myself in the truth of His word and make time to be with Him to get perspective. I allow Him to fill me, so that I can move towards others already fully loved...not needing them to fill me up. In Christ, I am loved and accepted...I already have the love that I need...I already have complete acceptance because of Christ's performance, not my own.

IV. Once in a place of abiding in Christ's love, I can take the opportunity to evaluate what is my responsibility in loving this person—

In loving others it is important to recognize what is our responsibility and what is God's?

Inner circle: My responsibility—what God is calling me to do in my present relationships and roles

Outer Circle (Circle of Concern)—Represents those things that we are concerned about that are important to us (the love of our spouse, our child's salvation, etc.)

God's responsibility

1) An *overresponsible* person takes on things that God has not assigned or equipped them to do and has unrealistic expectations for what they can do. They have a “messiah complex”. I am here to save you...This generally involves trying to control others...

2) An *irresponsible* person fails to recognize their responsibilities and God-given responsibilities.

3) *Genuinely Confused* about what is their responsibility in this relationship and what is God's responsibility

Explain the two circle:

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“People confuse these circles in two main ways. First they allow the inner circle to expand into the outer circle so that they function as mini-messiah’s, trying to do what only God can do. Second they shrink the inner circle and, under the guise of trusting God, neglect to do what God calls them to do. (Paul Tripp, Instruments in the Hands of the Redeemer)

Example: Sharon’s daughter is rebellious and irresponsible. Sharon is very concerned and makes the statement, “I am going to make sure my daughter grows up to be a responsible adult who loves Jesus.” (She has improperly expanded her circle of attempting to do what only God can do.) Second response: Having too small an inner circle—attempting to give back to God what He has called me to do—What if Sharon said, “I’ve decided to let go and let God deal with my daughter. I can’t parent her anymore. God is just going to have to work a miracle.” First, I will waste time and prayer if I wait for God to do something He has assigned me to do. Second, things will worsen because of what I have left undone.

It is important to evaluate our “love responses” through this grid of what our true responsibility is and what is God’s.

I. Loving the Hard Cases

A. **Loving Repeat Offenders:** Repeat offenders are those who hurt you in similar ways over and over. These are the ones Jesus is talking about when asked the question about how many times we should forgive and he says
70 X 7

Matthew 18:21-22 **21** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

A. **22** Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.[a]

The importance of keeping short accounts: If this relational dynamic is recurring anger, bitterness, grief, disappointment can pile up in a hurry! It’s really important to sort out what is going on in your heart, or it will shut down.

[Ephesians 4:31](#)

*Get rid of all **bitterness**, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*

In a relationship where the hurts get repeated over and over anger, disappointment, bitterness, grief, and resentment have to be battled (sometimes daily) otherwise your heart becomes hardened.

Here are some questions to ask yourself that can help you figure out what is going on for you:

- What is this person doing that is so hurtful and disruptive?
- What is the message to you in this (they don’t value me? I’m not important enough for them to listen to me? My feelings don’t matter?)
- What does the relational dynamic bring out in you? Do you struggle with depression, rage, animosity, resentment, etc...
- What difficult emotions get triggered by interactions in this relationship
- What do you long for in this relationship that you are not getting?
- Are you hoping or expecting them to give you something that they cannot or will not give?
- What are the specific things this person does that “triggers” you?
- Do you respond the way you want to or do you sin against them in your responses?

These questions help us to understand our side of the relationship, what our expectations are, and what we long to be different.

Start with your sin... It is rare when we are in a painful relationship dynamic that we

are, and what we long to be different.

Start with your sin... It is rare when we are in a painful relationship dynamic that we don't have our own sin to deal with. Typically where there is a sense of injustice, there will be anger, and often (but not always) in anger there will be sin. Do you need to begin with confession of any sin on your part? (sinful responses to their sinful or thoughtless reactions.) Please keep in mind that another's sin against me does not justify my sinful response. I have to own my responsibility for my sinful reactions. This is a first huge step...to realize that their sin, thoughtlessness or insensitivity does not justify my sinful response.

Psalm 32: 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."

Identify what their sin is against you. What do they continue to do that is so painful? Is this sin or a different approach to relating/personality style? What's the impact of this on you? Really take time to think about the impact piece...this is very important when you get to the point where forgiveness from the heart needs to take place

Personal example: in the early years of my marriage (and this can still happen at times) Bob and I had a recurring issue that would hurt me deeply. I would find myself in tears over and over related to the same dynamic. I would try very hard to please him as a wife. I would fail...over and over in a variety of areas. I felt so inadequate, incompetent, not valued for what I was doing. It was so painful to feel like I was failing so often. Bob, an engineer, has been trained to identify problems and solve them. Often when something wasn't "working" in our household, he would correct me and my way of dealing with that issue. Bob's a "say it like it is" guy. No mincing words with him. I felt unappreciated for all the times I had tried to deal with this issue...I would try harder... and eventually end up in tears at some point where he would see some "crack" or failure in my attempts. Eventually, I began to look upon him as the bad guy and began to deeply resent him. I was very defensive and hurt by the lack of appreciation It was like a gradual chafing of fabric in the same spot day after day, year after year. I became so sensitive that if he would start in with criticism I would erupt! So what's going on here...

What did I long for: appreciation for my efforts and understanding

What was he doing that was so painful—criticizing my efforts and doing so in a way that felt harsh and unkind.

Was I bending in to him to make myself okay? Yes, I needed his approval...Anytime Bob criticized me I felt "Inadequate, not valued, not good enough!" I did not believe God's was enough...I needed this affirmation from Bob. I really did not understand the depths of God's love for me or how sufficient His love could be. I did not realize that I could receive this from Abiding in Christ's love.

How I became okay in the midst of this dynamic continuing for many years:

- I began to see God as my source of affirmation...not Bob.
- I confessed that I had made Bob an idol.
- I began to let God meet some of the needs that I was looking for Bob to meet.
- When I saw resentment and bitterness in my heart—I confessed this bitterness to God and asked Him to soften and change my heart.
- I turned to God to affirm me in ways I longed to be affirmed.
- I forgave Bob for his responses that hurt me.
- I continued to try to communicate the pain these interactions caused and keep my heart open to him. (Note sometimes I did this with a demanding heart...other times I could do this more objectively and with an open hand to him receiving or not receiving my feedback.)

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Sometimes we have to grieve what they cannot or will not give to you that you believe you need: Many people skip over this step...they try to kill the desire or kill the relationship in anger for that person not meeting that need. They either shut down their heart and turn on themselves for “being needy” or they live angry and bitter at that person for “withholding from them” what you believe they are entitled to

Ask God to Meet the Needs/Longing that That Person is Not Meeting:

God I long for this...will you fill me with your love; will you show me your heart towards me.

When you Abide in God’s love, He can meet many of the deep needs of our hearts freeing us up to be able to interact more lovingly even when we are deeply offended and hurt by others’ treatment of us.

Choose forgiveness— we’ll talk more about this in a little bit

Confront their sin: If your brother/Sister in Christ sins against you, you are to go to them and convey how they sinned against you. This ultimately is for reconciliation... which may or may not happen...it will depend on their response to the confrontation... will they choose humility or hostility.

If the behavior continues, determine if there are boundaries you need to establish with this person when they move into repetitive, but harmful behaviors. (it might be helpful to process this with a wise mentor or counselor.)

B. Loving “Fools”

Describing a Fool:

Fools are Proud—think they are right. They are Unteachable:

Proverbs 15:12 The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 18:2

Fools Trust In Themselves Rather than God

Proverbs 28:26 Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.

Fools say there is no God.

Psalm 14:1 A psalm of David. Only fools say in their hearts,

“There is no God.” They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!

Fools see no need to make amends for their sin

Proverbs 14:8-10 The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception. Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.

Fools are speak impulsively do not control their tongue :

24. Proverbs 29:11 Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back.

[Pro 10:14](#) The wise store up knowledge, but the mouth of a **fool** invites ruin

Dealing with a Fool:

Proverbs 26:4-5 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.

1) **Responding to a fool in the way they are responding to you is folly.** Don’t do it...if they use contempt and mock you do not enter into this with them. If you respond to a fool in like manner...you join them in their foolishness.

For example, “A gentle reply turns away wrath.” If you are yelled at, do not respond by yelling back. (I am still learning this!)

1 Peter 2:22And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges rightly. Defending

1 Peter 2:22 And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges rightly. Defending and justifying with a fool generally spirals and escalates the situation.

2) For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 1 Peter 2:15

By doing right, we may be able to silence the foolish.

Jesus reaction to a fool: The rich young ruler—(Luke 18:18-25) The rich young ruler came to Jesus for a few finishing points on how to be righteous. He was sincere and good-intentioned, but diseased with the fatal flaws of arrogance and greed. He asked Jesus “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 18:18) A normal, kind response to his question would have affirmed his sincerity, but missed his disease. Instead Jesus’ response responded to his arrogance by exposing the greed in his heart by touching the very area that he wasn’t ready to deal with...”Go and sell your possessions and come follow me.” Jesus exposed the true motivations of his heart. Dan Allender *Bold Love*

“A fool’s folly must be exposed, consequences experienced, and the failure of love discussed and worked through to repentance. Dan Allender Bold Love

Relating to an Evil-doer

There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, read more. A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. Psalm 6:16-19

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. **Avoid such people.***

If you can avoid evil-doers, there is a biblical precedent for doing so.

*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. **Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” ...1 Peter 3: 8-18***

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. Romans 12:19

If you cannot avoid the evil-doer, then leave room for God’s wrath by not trying to make them pay. We can heap “coals of kindness” though.

C. Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Boundaries

Forgiveness is a decision and a process.

- a. Forgiveness as a decision of the Will—can be...my heart is not fully there, but I choose to forgive this person. Lord, help me forgive from the heart.
- b. Forgiveness from the Heart—recognizing the impact of the sin on you and, in time, after you have connected;
- c. *Matthew 18:35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

- In time, after you have connected,
- c. *Matthew 18:35* "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."
 - d. Forgiveness frees the forgiver...unforgiveness ties you to the offender. You carry the impact of their sin and keep them on a chain of accountability to you. Free yourself and give them to God. It is His to avenge.
 - e. When it is hard to forgive, ask God to show you the depths of need for your own forgiveness...it's easier to forgive much when we have been forgiven much!
 - f. Asking for God to help you see that person as God sees them.

Forgiveness does not equal reconciliation—reconciliation is a two way street.

Reconciliation requires repentance on the part of the other party. There cannot be complete reconciliation if one of the parties refuses to acknowledge and repent of their sin.

- g. Without repentance there can be no reconciliation with God...the same is true for our earthly relationships.

Boundaries may have to be put in place for the unrepentant one...not with the goal of making him or her pay, but to provide protection and to forthrightly expose the action as sinful and unacceptable.

- h. Boundaries for my abuser meant that he did not get alone time with my children. Until he repented and acknowledged his sin, there could not be movement towards trusting and reconciliation

i.

“Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.”

Jesus (and God the Father) saw our true need...He saw the cancer of our sin killing us, He saw our spiritual deadness and our ways of trying to find life that brought destruction and futility, He saw the ways we were deceiving ourselves into believing that maybe if we did enough good it would counter the bad and we would be “good enough” to spend eternity in heaven. He loved us so much He was willing to sacrifice His very life to become the solution to our problem. J

Do we love to the degree that we are willing to see the true need in others and be willing to sacrifice ourselves, risk rejection,

True love does not play into another’s self deception when that deception is destroying them...true love speaks truth into deception.

True love is willing to risk rejection to address sin and destructive patterns of behaving, living, and relating in another.

True love is willing to sacrifice one’s own needs, wants, desires to see another healed, freed, redeemed.

However, we don’t sacrifice so another can keep their idols...

We don’t sacrifice so that others can hide their sin

We don’t sacrifice to keep deception going so that this person can keep up a façade.

Conclusion:

If we try to love **apart** from abiding, we will **fail**. As we abide in Christ’s love we can come to relationships full, not empty.

John 7:38 says, “He who believes in me from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.

Those rivers of living water is the Spirit of God indwelling us allowing us to be a place of life and refreshment to those around us.

