

3-6-22 Sermon #8

A couple are on a date at a fancy restaurant. The woman tells the man to say something to her that will get her heart racing. He replies, "I forgot my wallet."

LET'S PRAY

During the messages over the last two months, I've been asking you to do things during the week, kind of like having homework. I know that many won't but, some of you do. Seeing God's characters living in us, is a vital part for getting a church to experience growth.

Last week, I asked all of you to look into the mirror and see how God's character of PRAISE, THANKFULNESS, GRACE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS and TRUST living in you. This practice is going to help with today's message. My challenge is to help you with naturally wanting to make things happen for Christ and to encourage you to fall deeper in love with Jesus.

As a new person to the Evangelical Congregational church, I love what the name represents and what the name stands for. The name speaks tremendous truth about what the bible asks us to do and it's what all churches need to do. Luke 10:2 states - **²He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.** The harvest is plenty and the workers are few. Over the last 2 years, our world has been facing a lot of crisis and it's making more people open for hearing about Christ. **James 2:14-17 may cause some discomfort but Christ wants us to become workers and not just hearers of the word. James 2 ¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us why ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** God's gifts go hand in hand with FAITH/ACTION.

I'd like to share a story with you. A friend of mine needed to go to get some parts for a 1950's Schwinn motorbike. We went to a person's home and went into his basement to get the parts. I was blown away. He had transformed his 1800 sq. ft. basement into one of the biggest train tracks that I've ever seen. He built detailed replicas of mountains, tunnels and cities. He had people in populated areas and old west towns. There was 8-10 different trains running from different directions. One train was functioning at different loading stations with cranes and machinery. He had passenger trains running and making stops along the way. It was incredible. He's been building this monstrosity for many years and he loves spending endless amounts of time and resources doing it. He "LOVES" to show it to everyone. It's like going on a tour. He showed 2 additional rooms that were filled with all kinds of parts and supplies. He had multiple work benches, drill presses and countless bins for organizing everything. We're all very similar to him but the things we chose to apply our energy is just different than his.

Growing a church and increasing our FAITH is also a freedom of choice. Knowing that God lives in us and knowing what are gifts are is what helps us with naturally wanting to engage people for God. Going back to my very first message **“WHO IS THIS JESUS”** and remembering the effect that Christ had on us, allows us to “feel” that joy and freedom that Christ gave. The #1 reason people find Christ is because they don’t want to spend eternity in HELL. Accepting Christ’s blood and forgiveness was the only way to be free. We get to spend eternity in HEAVEN with God. Heaven became very real. I’ve never been in a conversation with any believer that didn’t find tremendous joy in talking about heaven. If we look in the mirror and examine ourselves for seeing God living in us, then we know how to evangelize to others.

Today we’re going to start exploring God’s greatest character. **The character of God’s LOVE.** It’s The GREATEST gift we can have but, do we really understand what it looks like? How good are you at showing what God’s LOVE is? If this is the greatest gift but we don’t understand or feel what it does in our lives, then how can we give love to others the way God intended it.

Last week, I also touched on God giving us a new name. When we first believed, our identity changed. No longer are we to be called sinners. Now we are to be called SAINTS who still sin. For some people this is tough to accept.

It’s real important for understanding how God loves. When we accept that He changed our name to SAINTS then we naturally want to live up to it. Kind of like when we became a Husband or Wife. Accepting this new name makes us act totally different from when we were single. **Is Jesus the bridegroom?** We marry Christ and this is when love proves to be the ultimate gift.

I’ve always had tremendous difficulty with grasping the kind of love that God has. I wasn’t raised by parents that ever used the words “I love you” and I never heard them say these words to each other. Growing up, I was that kind of child that was attracted to trouble and it wasn’t uncommon for my parents to get unexpected calls from the school or other authorities. I drove them nuts. I was the youngest child and both of my siblings were great students and rule followers. Not me, they got a huge surprise. My mom tried paddles, grounding and I thought her normal voice anger. My dad was more of the let’s talk about it kind of a guy. Nothing worked. Some of you may be able to relate to this.

After finding Christ, I remember asking my folks why they never said I love you to us or to each other. They told me that if we didn’t know it, then the words won’t ever matter. I get that, but for me, since I was always in trouble, love was not attractive to me. I never felt a healthy kind of love and I always disappointed the ones that loved me. it wasn’t until after I accepted Christ that I really started to need love.

Sadly, I found Christ in a very black and white church and the pastor’s messages re-enforced how bad of a sinner I was. The word “Love” became even more confusing.

I learned that this too, isn’t so uncommon to feel this way. We’re all in tremendous need for feeling love and yet we really miss the mark at giving love. That ability to see CHRIST/GODS CHARACER in us, is what’s needed to help us with understanding what it FEELS like. We do need to know that we are truly loved by God.

When I hear people quote John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

When you first heard this, did you really understand it?

I don't think that "lost people" understand this language and I'm not really sure that many people grasp the heart part. In preparing for a message about feeling God's healthy LOVE, I asked a number of friends to describe what God's love is? Very few people could explain what God's love feels like. They could quote scriptures but they really struggled with making me feel it. Understanding a healthy meaning to God's character of LOVE is tough.

I'm starting this series by illustrating some examples of how we approach love. When we break love into 4 types of love. Storge – empathy bond. Philia – friend bond. Eros – romantic love. Agape – unconditional "God" love. Agape is the ultimate

If we remember how it felt when we wanted to go from being a boyfriend or girlfriend to a spouse, it can show us that we do have God's character of love in us.

Intellectually, we know that Love is what will motivate us to do anything. If we look in the mirror and feel how many ways love lives in us, then we might just get better at demonstrating it.

GOD always gives His love and is never demanding anyone to LOVE him back. It's unconditional. I don't believe that God is ever asking us to Love Him more than He's ever going to LOVE us.

One phrase I wish Christians would never use is, We can hate the sin but love the person (sinner). To be honest with you, this phrase makes me want to be liked instead of being loved. It re-enforces that love is not going to have a good result. I don't know anyone who wants to associate "being Loved" as getting rejected, disciplined or corrected.

God also tells us that if we want anything, we must first give it. If you want friends you must be a friend, if you want blessings you must be a blessing, if you want forgiveness you must forgive, if you want mercy you must first be merciful. **Love is the same.** If we want anything in this life, we must first give it away and seek nothing in return.

The character of God's love is the opposite of man's desires. While we were still sinners God gave His son.

Looking in the mirror and remembering how the gift of the Spirit changed us in a blink of an eye or being adopted by God is so powerful. During my studies this week, I read, God's character of love is kind of like when a child is born. The way we hold that child, kiss them, caress their head and look at them with an awe inspiring heart, expresses the feeling of love. Then the author made his main point.

There's a lot of people that don't want that baby.

He then made the point that anyone who has ever adopted always wants that child. If you're an animal lover this also applies to when you first held your new puppy or kitten. The softness of our touch and the way we pull them into our neck and kiss their little head. We use every bit of our living being to make an adoption happen.

God is wanting to adopt all of us but, we can choose to say "NO". Even when we say "NO", God never stops chasing after us and He never gives up. This is why He was willing to pay a "sacrificial price" for us to be in HEAVEN with Him.

When we accept Jesus, He just keeps hugging us and holding us and telling us that we are His children. Being able to experience God's loving arms around us when the worst of things happen is another great example of God's character of LOVE. It's a gift that everyone who comes to believe needs to know. When we can see this character of God living in our hearts, then we can't help but want to give this to the lost people in this world.

We're also called to let our light shine and be seen by others. Showing God's love instead of telling others that they must believe, is much easier and much more attractive. If our light shines, it attracts others and deep inside they want to know what makes us different. For mature Christians, when the newness of being adopted wears off, using our gifts is how we attract the lost to Christ.

God's love is perfect and is a model for how to love. **(1 Corinthians 13:4-7) Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.** Can you imagine being loved like this? It would change your life. The truth is this is an accurate description of God's love for you. Though this passage is often read at weddings, humans cannot love perfectly as God does because we are imperfect. But it makes sense that people strive to have their love for one another reflect these qualities. Everyone needs this type of love, but if you expect it from another person, you will be let down. God is the only one who can love you perfectly. And when you have a relationship with God and experience His love, it empowers you to love others the way God loves you.

God's love is too great to fully understand. **(Ephesians 3:18-19) And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.** God's love is so great that we, as mere humans, cannot fully understand it. Humans' love for one another often depends at least partly on the behavior of the person being loved. God's love for us does not. Do you long to be known and loved for who you are? God is the only one who can truly do that.

God's love is a shield surrounding you and keeping you safe. **(Psalm 5:11-12) But let all who take refuge in You rejoice; let them sing joyful praises forever. Spread Your protection over them, that all who love Your name may be filled with joy. For You bless the godly, O LORD; You surround them with Your shield of love.** God's love is so much more than the warm fuzzy feeling we often associate with the word love. His love is a

powerful force, protecting and comforting us. Being in God's love is a position of not just joy but also safety. When you run to God for protection, He surrounds you with His shield of love. Think about that image for a while. Experience the security you have because God's love surrounds you. Let His love flood your mind with a sense of peace and comfort.

When you fully experience God's love, you have nothing to fear.(1 John 4:18)Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love. When you understand that God loves you no matter what, you no longer need to be afraid of your failings causing Him to love you less. If you could only truly know the depth of God's love, you would have nothing to fear. God already knows about the wrong things you've done as well as any you will do. He still chose to love you.

Are you secure in your relationship with God: Nothing can separate you from God's love. Romans 8:35, 37-39 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ... No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow — not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below — indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. God is more powerful than anything in heaven or on earth. When you accept Jesus' invitation to begin a relationship with God, you are secure in His love forever. There is nothing powerful enough to separate you from God's love. Even when things are difficult or you feel far from God, it's not because God stops loving you. The truth is that God will never stop loving you, no matter what you do.

LETS PRAY