

THE LOVE MYTH: UNDERSTANDING LOVE

Week 1: A Warm Feeling

It's that time of year again. The time of year that many people who are single dread; the month of February, or as those who aren't in a relationship think, "Single Awareness Day." Seriously though, for most of us, this month is often thought of as the "Love Month" because of one day, February 14th. It is on this day we celebrate those special people in our lives. We buy them overpriced cards and candy, overvalued flowers and sometimes rather expensive jewelry. And we do this all in the name of love.

The part of this that sometimes gets lost is the fact that some of the very people who go all out for their special someone in the name of love, will be celebrating this "special" day with someone else next year. Let that sink in for just a moment. This year they are going all out for the love of their life and then next year, some people will repeat this process with the "new" someone in their life.

ILLS: When I was in high school, there were a few girls who had a certain reputation. Now, this is probably not the kind of reputation you might be thinking. The reputation I'm talking about is one that involved finding a guy to start dating just before Valentine's Day just so they would receive flowers, balloons and candy at school like several other girls did on that special day. We lovingly referred to them as the "V-Day only girls". They were the girls who would start dating any guy who would give them attention, but soon after February was over, they no longer had the time of day for those guys. The guy's poor heart gets broken all in the name of love. Perhaps, some of you go to school with "V-Day only girls."

We talk casually about the things and people we love, don't we? We typically think of love as some type of feeling we have for someone or something. However, if we really understood what it meant to love, we'd probably be more cautious about using the word.

For the next 3 weeks, I want us to look at a series I'm calling, "The Love Myth: Understanding Love" because I'm afraid our world today doesn't really understand what the word love means.

And if those of us who are older don't understand what it means, then that means we are not teaching you guys the proper understanding of it either.

WHAT IS LOVE?

What is love to you? Depending on who you ask and what their experiences might be, you will get both positive and negative answers concerning love.

Some of the negative answers might include: Love is messy, love is trouble, love is fading, love is only conditional, love breaks hearts, love is exhausting.

Some of the positive answers might include: Love is patient and kind, love sacrifices, love is loyal, love doesn't keep records of wrong, love never fails.

READ I CORINTHIANS 13:1-8a, 13

Look at all the different words Paul uses to tell us what love is or what love does.

Love is Patient – What does it mean to be patient? What does it mean that love is patient? Love is willing to be patient with the people who are easy to give up on.

Love is Kind – How is love kind? Love looks for ways and opportunities to do good.

Love Bears all things – What does this mean? Love is supportive and doesn't easily give up on others even though that might be the easiest thing to do.

Love Believes all things – What does this mean? When we truly love, we are always willing to believe the best in other people.

Love Hopes all things – People who understand what it means to love are people who never lose hope.

Love Endures all things – Real biblical love is willing to persevere and endure any difficulties that come. Just consider how a parent's love endures when a child rebels.

Love never fails. The spiritual gifts the Corinthians were dividing over would one day be done away with. Paul wanted them to understand that love is what truly lasts (v. 13).

Which one of these words sticks out to you the most? Which one of these traits do you most like to see in the people you spend the most time around?

The interesting thing about each of the words Paul uses to describe love is none of the words are about feelings; they are all about choices and actions.

MORE THAN A FEELIN'

I have talked to many young people who are in a relationship with someone for a short period of time and they think they have this feeling of love. What I hope you come to understand through this series of lessons is that love is not just some type of inward feeling we have, but actions we choose to engage in.

ILLS: I can tell my wife I love her all day and maybe she will believe me just based on my words for a little while. However, if my words are not eventually backed up by actions, she won't believe I truly love her. She will want to see my love for her through my actions. Why? Love is not just a cozy feeling you feel on the inside for someone else. Love is a series of actions you choose to engage in.

As a husband to my wife, of course I have all these warm and cozy feeling about her, but more importantly every day I wake up I make the choice to choose to love her and I hope to demonstrate that love through my actions.

Consider a few other verses that will hopefully help us better understand love.

Matt. 14:13-14 – Jesus had compassion (love) for the people and healed their sick. This love has nothing to do with feeling and everything to do with a choice and action.

Luke 6:27-36 – Jesus is not talking about warm and cozy feelings towards our enemies, but about actions. We must choose to love even in our enemies through our actions.

John 13:34-35 – People will know we are disciples of Christ by our love for one another. Again, it's about Christians choosing to act and demonstrate love and not some warm feeling.

How different might our world be if we had a better understanding of what it means to love. I hope and pray you and I will come to realize love is more than just some feeling; love is a choice we make and demonstrate.

Let us pray!

THE LOVE MYTH: UNDERSTANDING LOVE

Week 2: Loving Those Who Love You

We are in the middle of a series called, “The Love Myth.” Tonight, I want us to think about the myth of loving only those who love us. Love is easy, at least when it comes to loving the people who love you and treat you well.

Consider a few examples of those who are easy to love: parents, grandparents, friends, etc. – Loving these people is easy because they love us in return and do good to us.

BUT...what about the people who do not love us, though? What about those people who are hard for us to love because of who they are, what they do or how they treat us?

ILLS: When I was in the 7th grade there was this guy in the 8th grade who didn’t seem to like me very much. We played on the football team together and were teammates, but every chance he had to pick on me he would. I grew up going to church and being taught lessons just like the one I am teaching right now. However, I did not like this guy. He was nothing but a big ole’ bully who I wanted to stand up to and get even with. I did not like him and I certainly did not want to love him.

If truth be told, we all know some people who we feel it is easier to hate than they are to love. What do we do about these people? How should we treat such people who we really want to hate?

JESUS CALLS US TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES (MATT. 5:43-48)

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law had apparently been teaching, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy (v. 43). Where had they learned this? The first part about loving your neighbor is found in the Law (Lev. 19:18). They understood they should love their neighbor. The problem was they didn’t have a correct understanding of who their neighbor was. Many believed their neighbor was only those associated with their nation or religion and not everyone they came in to contact with. Thus, they had a limited understanding of what it meant to love their neighbor.

The second problem was they wrongly inferred and even taught that they were to hate their enemies. Sadly, this is an all too common practice. Instead of loving those who are different from us and maybe even mean to us, we naturally learn to despise and hate them.

Jesus taught something different; we might even call it radical. Jesus taught His followers to go beyond just loving those who love them. In fact, Jesus said, “Love your enemies.” That’s a bold statement that at times may seem impossible. Why? Because this goes against our human nature. Our response a lot of times when it comes to our enemies is to either get even or just keep our distance from them. However, note this is not just a statement, but rather a command from Jesus. He commands us to love even those we would probably rather hate.

QUESTION: Do you have some people you know who are hard to love? Why is it so hard to love those we would consider to be our enemies?

Who Are Those Who Are Our Enemies? (Luke 6:27-30)

- A. Those who hate us (v. 27).
- B. Those who curse us (v. 28).
- C. Those who mistreat us (v. 28).
- D. Those who hit us (v. 29).
- E. Those who take from us (vs. 29-30).

QUESTION: Do you have some people in your life who would fit into one of these categories? If so, then guess what? You have some enemies.

QUESTION: How do you treat these enemies in your life? My guess is you probably don’t treat them with love because you consider them to be your enemy.

However, what did Jesus say about our enemies? He said we are to “love them” (Matt. 5:44).

QUESTION: How are we to love our enemies?

The Greek word Jesus used for love was “agapao” (agape). This is the word used often to describe God’s love. It is a love that is kind, benevolent and even sacrificial toward another.

As we discussed in last week's lesson, love is not just some warm feeling we have. Biblical love is a choice we make to act or do something even though we may not feel like doing it.

Consider an example: Recently, I arrived home late one evening after an extremely long and stressful day to find my oldest son eagerly waiting for my arrival. He was so excited when I walked in the door. However, his excitement wasn't for the sheer fact that he just missed his daddy, but it was because he had been waiting all day to play with daddy. He convinced mommy to let him stay up past his bedtime so he could play with daddy before he went to bed. Now, I'm going to be honest with you. I didn't feel like playing at that moment. I was tired and just wanted to sit down and relax a little. When he asked me what I wanted to play, I didn't have this overwhelming warm feeling swell up in my heart. Remember, I really didn't want to play. However, love is a choice to act or do something even when we don't necessarily feel like it. So, do you know what I did? I got down in the floor and played football with my son. Why? Because I love him dearly and wanted to make him happy even if that meant not sitting down to relax like I wanted.

We must never forget, Love is a choice to act. Now notice how Jesus teaches us to love our enemies.

HOW TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES (LUKE 6:27-36)

1. *DO GOOD TO THEM* (v. 27). The Greek word for "Do" is "poieo" (poy-eh-o). It means, "to make or produce" or "to construct or form." Sometimes we may feel because we do not respond to our enemies that we have done enough. However, Jesus tells us we should respond just not in the way we would probably imagine. He says we are to actively do something and that something should be done in love. When was the last time you made the choice to do something good for someone you considered to be your enemy?
 - Exodus 23:4-5 – "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. ⁵ If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him."

- Proverbs 25:21-22 – “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,²² for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.
- Romans 12:17-21 – “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ ²⁰ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
- I Thessalonians 5:15 – “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.”

2. *BLESS THEM* (v. 28). When we speak to or about our enemies, we must use kind or friendly words. Our words can be damaging, can’t they. In fact, there are not too many things in life that have more power than the words which we speak. However, we aren’t to use our words to hurt those who we consider our enemies even if they have hurt us. Most likely, our response when speaking to or about an enemy is to use our words to hurt them and hurt them badly. However, that should never be the case in the life of a follower of Christ.

- Proverbs 12:18 – “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise bring healing.”
- Proverbs 15:1 – “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

3. *PRAY FOR THEM* (v. 28). We probably pray for a lot of things that concerns us, but how often do we pray for the very people who abuse or hurt us? Honestly, probably not nearly enough, right? However, notice the exact words of Jesus. Jesus said, “Pray for those who abuse you.” We should take careful note that we are to pray for our enemies and not just about them (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60).

- **QUESTION:** What is the difference between praying for our enemies and praying about them?

- **QUESTION:** What should we pray for when it comes to our enemies?
- When we pray for our enemies we are doing more for ourselves than we are for them. By praying for our enemies, we help guard our hearts against becoming bitter or hostile towards them. It's really hard to hate the people we are praying for.

WHY SHOULD WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES?

What God calls us to do concerning loving our enemies goes against our very nature. It goes against everything we hear and see in our society today. It just doesn't make sense. So, why should we do it? Why should we love those we would rather hate?

Jesus said, "So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:45).

When we love our enemies, we display we are God's children. Think about it like this. Children typically have some resemblance to their parents. Take me for example. There is no doubt when you see my dad and me, you see the resemblance. The same goes for when you see my two boys and me. Both of my boys have traits that resemble me and display that they are my children.

Likewise, when you and I love our enemies, we display we are children of God for all to see. Why? Because worldly people who don't love God would never love their enemies. It just doesn't make sense. The only people who are going to love their enemies and do good to them are people who live under the influence of something greater than themselves; that something is God.

- I John 3:10 - "By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."
- I John 4:19-21 – "We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

- Jn. 13:35 – “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

When we love our enemies, we display the love of God. God provides sunshine and rain for all people, both the good and the evil (Matt. 5:45). He doesn't just love and provide for the righteous, he loves and provides for all people.

The world may tell you to only love those who love you, but Jesus teaches something much different. Jesus raises the bar and teaches us to love not just our neighbors but also our enemies.

May you and I live up to the standard Jesus set of loving even our enemies.

Let us pray.

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Week 3: Love Is Not Messy

What is the strangest thing you have ever seen or heard of someone doing in the name of love?

ILLS: John Tuchek was the police chief of Lanesboro, Minnesota. Tuchek convinced himself that he could win his ex-girlfriend back if she had a chance to see what a selfless and caring person he was. So he came up with a plan wherein he would set fire to her apartment building and rush in to save her from the raging fire. It may shock you to learn that this plan fell apart. After all was said and done, over half a million dollars in damage was done and John was sentenced to jail (The World's Stupidest Men, Pg. 157).

People will do crazy things to prove their love. In the book of Hosea, one man goes to great lengths to love his wife. However, the book of Hosea is not really about the love story of Hosea and Gomer. It's a story about the incredibly strange and messy love of God.

LOVE DOESN'T ALWAYS MAKE SENSE (Hosea 1:1-3)

God called Hosea to love a woman it made no earthly sense to love. Gomer was not the nicest girl on the block and was someone who would become unfaithful to him.

When you go looking for someone to spend the rest of your life with, I highly doubt you will be looking for someone who you know is going to run off and become unfaithful. Who wants to love and care for someone who is going to be unfaithful to the relationship? No one I have ever met. However, this is exactly what God called Hosea to do.

The people of Israel had refused to listen to the Lord and His prophets and had become unfaithful. Their relationship with God is best summed up by the word "harlotry" or "whoredom" which is used throughout the book of Hosea (1:2). Israel was not who they should have been. The people continued down a path of spiritual adultery. Just notice some of the things they were doing (4:1-6, 12-13; 13:5-6).

God was going to use Hosea's relationship with Gomer to illustrate His relationship with Israel. When the people of Israel saw Hosea's strange love for Gomer, it would serve as a living testament for

them of the love God had for His people. If they really stopped and thought about their relationship with God, it made very little sense for God to love Israel after all they had put Him through. They had failed to keep the greatest commandment of loving the Lord with all their hearts (Deut. 6:4-5).

Time after time throughout the scriptures, we see God loving those who we might deem unlovable. These people have done nothing to earn God's love. All they had done was mess up and hurt God by the choices and decisions they made. How could God love such people?

There are a lot of people and maybe even some of you, who are thinking, "How could God possibly love me? I'm so unlovable." God loves you because the love of God doesn't make sense. God's love is not conditional it's unconditional.

EX: The love a parent has for a troubled child may not make sense to most people (enter a personal story here). Thankfully, a parent's love is not conditional, it's unconditional.

I'm thankful that the love of God doesn't make sense, because if it did, if the love of God was only conditional, there would be many people who would have little hope.

LOVE DOESN'T GIVE UP (Hosea 3:1)

Somewhere along in their relationship, it appears Gomer became unfaithful to Hosea (3:1-5). Israel had done the same thing to God repeatedly and He wanted to illustrate his love for them by asking Hosea to do something that would have been extremely hard. God wanted Hosea to go get Gomer, take her home and love her again.

What would you have told Hosea at this point? Most likely, we would have told him to run as far away from Gomer as possible. However, God wanted him to love her, "Even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods" (3:1).

Even though Israel would suffer the consequences of their sins, God would not give up on them completely (Hos. 1:10-2:1; 19-20; 11:8). Israel had openly brought shame on God in the same way Gomer had brought shame upon Hosea. Both turned their backs on the ones who loved them. And yet, God's love never gives up on people even when it seems all hope is gone.

Maybe you have given up on yourself? Maybe you have you given up on someone else? Maybe you think there's NO HOPE, that they're too far gone and too damaged. Can I tell you something? God hasn't given up on that person and neither should we. God's love can't give up because God IS LOVE! (1 Jn. 4:7-8).

LOVE ISN'T DESERVED (3:2-5)

Gomer had become a slave so Hosea had to pay the price for her freedom. Notice Hosea paid half in cash and half in his food supply to buy back what was already his. Gomer doesn't deserve the love and mercy of Hosea. She had been unfaithful and according to the Law, she deserved to be stoned to death.

What's interesting is Hosea didn't buy Gomer back because she deserved it, but because that's what God told him to do. God told Hosea to love Gomer as he loves His people.

We must always remember, God's love isn't deserved or earned on our part. God doesn't love us because of who we are but because of who HE IS! Paul tells us, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us..." (Rom. 5:8).

God's love may be messy, but that's what makes it so beautiful. His love doesn't make sense because he loves not only the good, but also those whose lives are a complete mess. And even though they may be unfaithful and have been for a long time, his love doesn't give up on them; not because they deserve such love, but because His love is a beautiful mess.

May we all be eternally grateful for the strange and messy love of God.

Let us pray.