

Commitment: Are You All In?

A Better Way to Love

Luke 5

2/26/17

- How many of you had “the talk” with your parents? Maybe your parents called it the talk about the birds and the bees. Maybe they just called it what it was – the talk about sex. How many of you had a time when your parents sat you down and had that initial talk about sex, the birds and the bees or whatever they might have called it?
 - o My parents did that. They were very proactive about it. They heard a whole series of teachings by Dr. James Dobson, a Christian psychologist and family expert, about talking to your children about sex. They put what they learned into practice. Sometimes, as a kid, I wished my Mom wasn’t as open to talking about it as she was. Later, I appreciated that she was because it kept me from a lot of heartache knowing I could talk to her.
 - o As the oldest, I was first to get “the talk.” My mom took me on a special outing of lunch and shopping. Then, my dad took my brothers out for breakfast and bowling when they were old enough.
 - o I remember laughing at my brothers when they were about to go on their special day out with Dad. They were all excited about it. We were on a tight budget and things like this didn’t happen very often at all. But, I knew what was going to happen. When they came back, they would say, “Why didn’t you tell us?”
- This talk and on-going conversation is extremely important to have with your children and has to happen earlier and earlier, unfortunately. But, I have found that lots and lots of families don’t even have this extremely important talk with their children. They leave it up to their kids just to find out somewhere because they are uncomfortable talking to their children about sex.
 - o In fact, it seems like the lessons that are the most important are the ones that are maybe the most uncomfortable to talk about, so they usually don’t get taught very well.
 - o That is unfortunate because the family is where we should be learning many, many things, especially the things that are uncomfortable and the most important. It was God’s design for the family to be where learning about hard things takes place in a safe, nurturing environment under the watchful wisdom of parents.
 - o When you think about it, we all have had various lessons within our families – how to tie your shoes, how to swing a baseball bat or kick a soccer ball, the rules of Monopoly, how to ride a bike, how to wash dishes or do laundry. But, often some of the biggest things in life are left to chance, to us just figuring it out. Or, even worse, we get the information from our culture and society.

- Loving people and relating to people are some of those important life lessons that we should learn in our families. But, in most families, no one ever sits down and says, "Here are the fundamentals of how to love, really love others." Or, "this is how you love in a marriage."
 - o Instead, we most often learned by watching, imitating and experimenting. We watched how our parents loved us and how they loved each other. We watched movies and shows about love and how that looked. We listened to songs about love. We observed other people in relationships to get an understanding of how relationships function.
 - o For many of us, the method of observation didn't work because we can have some pretty poor and imperfect models to observe. Trying emulate the fantasy of the media doesn't work in the real world.
 - o People can come from broken, stress-filled, volatile homes where the marriage relationship is tense and struggling. Watching people's relationships in order to try to figure out how to love is dangerous because, as people, we are imperfect. And, really, the one thing that we are best at loving is ourselves. That kind of selfish love doesn't work well in relationships when you want to commit to making them last.
 - o So, as a result, we've hurt some people, especially those we claim to love the most even though we didn't really mean to. We've damaged some relationships and we have regrets about others.
- Over the past few weeks, we have been talking about commitment. We started by looking at our commitment to our families and how that is lived out the lives of our families. Then, we moved on to commitment in marriage and really in any deep relationship.
 - o Two weeks ago, we saw that the first thing you have to commit to do if you want a marriage that will last is that you have to commit to forgive. It is the biggest and probably the hardest commitment you have to make – to forgive all the stuff your spouse has done and will do. As we said, your spouse has the potential to hurt you more than anyone else. Yet, if you aren't all in enough to forgive, your marriage won't last.
 - o Today, we are going to look at something else that will ensure you are committed and all in regarding your marriage or any relationship you have. That is how you determine to love. There most certainly are right ways to love and wrong ways to love. How do you love? What is the best way to love someone?
 - o Unfortunately, as we have seen, really loving someone is a lesson that has often been left up to observation and chance. Let me ask this question – if people were to watch the way you love people, would they have the right impression on how to really love people, how to really love your family, how to really love your spouse?
 - o Obviously, we need a better example.
- See, Jesus didn't leave the love lesson to chance. He knew that learning to love wouldn't happen by accident. He knew that the best lessons come through both words and then seeing those words lived out. So, he did both. Let's see how he did it.

- First, he started by using a better word for love. Whenever he taught, he taught about a specific kind of love. He set up a better word that his followers should use when they expressed love for him and for others.
 - See, in Jesus' day, there were three main common words for the word love. Those were eros, phileos and agape. Pastor Wil eluded to agape love last week. But, which of these three words you used distinguished the kind of love you were talking about.
 - Today, we distinguish between like and love, but we really only have one word to express love. We say we love pizza. And, we say we love our children. We love chocolate and we love God. We use the same word. Unfortunately, I believe over the centuries having only one expression of love has watered down what love is for us.
- Let's take a look at the three main words Jesus could have used to express his love.
- First, there is eros. Eros is a sensual love. It is based on your senses, feelings, passion and attraction. Since it is based on feelings, it is a very selfish, self-centered kind of love that asks the question "What can I get out of this?" Eros is really more like lust than love.
 - Because of its selfish nature, eros loves when...when something or someone is pleasing, when it is attractive, when it serves me in some way.
 - Second is phileos love which is relational love. It is a deeper kind of love. It is the love you have for friends. Philadelphia is derived from phileos and is known as the city of...brotherly love. This love asks the question, "What can we get out of this?"
 - Phileos loves because...because we are friends who care for one another, because you help me and I help you.
 - Then, there is agape love. This is the deepest kind of love. It is unconditional. It is sacrificial. It is about the other person and not about self. It is extended even though it might not receive anything in return. Agape love asks the question "What can you get out of this?"
 - Agape loves in spite of...in spite of if you love me, in spite of the risk, is spite of what you do or don't do for me, in spite of whether you deserve my love or not.
- Now, which type of love do you think Jesus taught about exclusively when he spoke of love between people and God and between each other? Agape!
- Agape the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Agape your neighbor as yourself. Agape your family, agape your spouse, agape your children, even agape your enemies. Within relationship, there is no room for any other kind of love. There can only be agape – unconditional, sacrificial, selfless agape love.
 - In God's design, this is the only love that could sustain a relationship like marriage or any other kind of relationship. And, there was only one kind of love that was acceptable to express toward each other. Agape, only agape.

- Then, after using a better word, Jesus taught about what that better love looks like. He gave people “the talk,” actually many talks about love.
 - o The Sermon on the Mount, lessons on loving your neighbor and your enemy, the parables – all lesson on agape love. He commanded people to agape love one another. He shared how blessed their lives would be if they agape loved exclusively, even if it meant their very lives.
 - o He said, “There is no greater love than being willing to lay down your life for your friend.”
- But, then, here’s the clincher to his love talks, his love word and his love lessons – he lived them out! Jesus agaped all over the place! He completed the love lesson by living that kind of love out in front of those who were watching.
 - o “I told you to love your enemies – let me show you how to do it. I told you I have come to the poor, the outcast, the lost – watch me as I do just that, watch how to agape love them. I told you that you are my friends and that the greatest love is to lay down your life for your friends, watch as I do just that.”
 - o Jesus’ life shows us various aspects of a better word and a better way to love. In fact, in one chapter in the book of Luke, we see Jesus exemplifying aspects of his better love. There are some specific action steps of better love, agape love, that we can, then, implement in our relationships and marriages.
 - o Let’s take a look at these in Luke 5. We are going to read various sections in this chapter. Let’s start with **Luke 5:1-3**.
- In this passage, we learn that better love makes the first move.
 - o Here is Jesus, teaching the crowd. More and more people are coming, trying to hear Jesus. A crowd is forming. So, Jesus decided to get in a boat to teach the crowd. That way, everyone could see and hear him better.
 - o Jesus made the first move to accommodate the crowd. He made the first move in love. It probably made him more uncomfortable trying to stand in a rocking boat, more exposed to the sun and the heat of the sun reflecting off the water. But, he did it for the sake of the crowd.
- Jesus also made the first move with Peter, here referred to as Simon. Jesus and Simon didn’t really know each other yet. Simon Peter is not one of his disciples yet. Simon Peter had heard about Jesus. His brother, Philip, was always talking about Jesus. He was interested a bit in Jesus.
 - o But, right now, he’s just a fisherman on the side of the Sea of Galilee washing his nets after a night of catching no fish. Jesus sought Peter out and made the first move in beginning the relationship. Peter may have thought that he was interested in Jesus, but in reality, Jesus was interested in Peter and pursuing Peter first. It was not a coincidence that Jesus chose that section of the shore to teach. He knew Peter was going to be there.

- In fact, if you were to look at your relationship with Jesus, I bet you would find that Jesus sought you out. He pursued you. He made the first move to bring you into a relationship with him. He loved you first. Better love makes the first move.
- In our relationships, better love makes the first move. You love before the other person starts to love you back. You love before the other person does something nice for you. You love before the other person apologizes. You might even apologize even when you don't think you really did anything wrong. That is better love. You love first = even when the other person isn't being all that loveable. You love first and make the first agape move.
 - So many times in relationships, we say, "I will do that for you if you do this for me." Last week, Pastor Wil used the passage of Scripture from Ephesians 5 which talks about wives respecting their husbands and husbands loving their wives.
 - How often, ladies, are we tempted think, "Well, I will respect him if he shows me some love!" How often, men, are you tempted to think, "Well, I will show her some love if she is respectful toward me!"
 - That is not agape love! That is eros love at worst and phileos at best. Neither can ever sustain a marriage. Better loves makes the first move and loves first.
- Then, after Jesus makes the first move with Peter, he goes on to love him better in **verses 4-11**.
 - Jesus has been using Peter's boat to teach the crowd. But, Jesus knew what was on Peter's mind. Peter and his fishing partners had been out all night and didn't catch anything. Peter was probably frustrated and tired.
 - He may have even been worried. How would he provide for his family if he kept bringing in no fish? Fishing was his livelihood.
- Jesus steps in to show that better love sets proper priorities.
 - Jesus knew Peters concerns and Peter's concerns were important to Jesus. So, even after a hard day's work of teaching the crowd and always having people press in on him, Jesus sets up proper priorities and put his relationship with Peter first.
 - Jesus was basically saying, "Teaching the crowd is important. And, I might just want to find some shade after being in this hot boat. But, Peter, you are more important. I want to spend time with you. And, I want to help you get some fish so you can provide for your family."
- Sometimes, after a long day at work, we just want to come home and veg. We want to relax, we want to breathe, we don't want to be bothered. In doing so, we might fail to love better. We fail to love with proper priorities. What should our priorities be?
 - Your relationship with God is the highest priority. You have to spend time in the presence of God. You have to talk to him, listen to him, be available.
 - Your relationship with your spouse is the most important human relationship you have. Your relationship with your spouse comes second only to your relationship with God.

- Your relationship with your children comes next. Let me make that clear – your relationship with your children comes after your relationship with your spouse. Let's put these in proper priority because it seems like in many families, pandering to the relationship with children comes before cultivating a healthy relationship between husband and wife.
 - Relationships with other people come after those immediate family relationships.
 - Your job comes after that. No matter how noble your job may be, your job comes last. And, your hobbies come even after your job.
- I want us to note that our top four priorities revolve around relationships. Doing some sort of task is dead last.
- For those of us who are task-oriented, this is going to stretch us. But, this is God's design, lived out as a lesson to us by Jesus himself. If we ignore his design, we are not living in his will.
 - God is not nearly as concerned about your work ethic and your job performance or your hobbies as he is about your relationship with your spouse and your children. If you come home so tired that you cannot focus attention or care on your family and you refuse to help out around the house or listen, you fail to set proper priorities.
 - If you are more concerned about how other people think of you rather than what your family thinks of you, you are going to lose in the end. If your spouse or children would say that you care more about your job or some hobby you might have than anything else, that is a red flag that you are failing your family.
 - If your spouse or children have to beg you, coerce you, bribe you, or make a deal with you to spend time with them, you need to wake up to what is right – a better way to love.
- Better love sets up proper priorities and makes those you are supposed to love feel secure in that love and then, want to follow your leadership. Because Jesus cared for Peter and made him a priority, Peter left everything and follow Jesus because he knew Jesus would take care of everything.
- If we care for our family and make them a priority, they will also follow our leadership because they know we love them better.
- Jesus goes on to interact with another man and exemplify another action step of better love. Let's continue reading **verses 12-14**.
- In that day, leprosy was a horrible skin disease. Leprosy was painful, humiliating and eventually, life-ending. In this account, we find out that the man had an advanced case. He had been suffering with leprosy for years.
 - Because of the severity of this disease, law required that anyone with leprosy remove themselves from society and human contact. They couldn't be around anyone other than other lepers.
 - So, we can surmise that this man had not touched someone or been touched for years. Can you imagine that? Never being able to see or touch or hug your wife,

stroke your daughter's hair, kiss your son when putting him to sleep, shake hands with a friend?

- This man came to Jesus with head bowed low because he knew he was violating the law by being so near to beg and ask if Jesus might be willing to heal him.
- In Jesus' actions, we learn that better love takes risks. Jesus took a risk to love that man in the way that he needed it most. Jesus could have simply said, "Be healed" and the man would have been clean.
 - But, more than needing healing, the man needed to be loved better. He needed to be touched. Jesus took the risk to reach out and touch this man.
 - We might think, "What risk? He couldn't get leprosy. He was God." He risked something else, though. Something that very often is the reason we keep from reaching out to others. He risked rejection.
 - See, by reaching out and touching a leper, it could affect if others would want to be around Jesus. It could possibly affect the influence and power of his ministry. He was now as unclean as the man with leprosy. He broke the law.
 - But, Jesus didn't care. Here was a man who needed to be reached out to and touched. In love, Jesus took the risk.
- Often, the biggest risk we take, like Jesus, is to reach out. Have you ever had an argument with your spouse or with another person and you think "I will not say anything first! I will not apologize first! I will not reach out first!" Reaching out to someone is risky.
 - There is a chance of rejection. And, for some reason, we think that reaching out in apology or reconciliation will put us in a less powerful position. We won't have the upper hand. Somehow it diminishes our influence, our power, our stand in an argument. As if love is about power.
 - In reality, the one who is able to set aside pride and reach out to another person first is really the stronger one because that is the action of Jesus. The one willing to take the risk for someone usually ends up having the most influence because it shows true strength and better love.
 - We all want someone to risk to reach out to us. Reaching out is risky. Love is risky. Better love takes risks.
- Let continue in **Luke 5:17-26** to see Jesus next way to love better.
 - In these verse, we find that better love meets real needs.
 - Jesus didn't just focus on the physical condition of the man. The friends of that man on the mat thought his biggest need was to be healed so he could walk.
 - But, Jesus knew that man better. He didn't simply heal this man like he did with the leper. This man had another need. Jesus knew this man's real need was to have his sins forgiven. This man needed to have his heart healed before he could be able to completely experience the joy that would come with having his legs healed.

- We are the same way. We want Jesus to heal something in our lives, but Jesus knows that really, we need to have our hearts healed first. So, he works on our hearts and meeting that need first. Then, he can answer the prayer requests in our lives.
 - o This is how Jesus is able to be the common denominator in our lives. We are all different. We all have different needs and different ways that we feel most loved. Jesus meets those needs. Jesus loves us in the way that we most can feel love.
- People with whom you have a relationship all have various ways that they best feel loved. There are books written about this. The Five Love Languages is one of those books. I have recommended this book in the past to couples. Basically, it says that each of us has a way by which we feel loved the most. Those methods or languages are: gifts, quality time, praise, physical touch and acts of service.
 - o Some people feel most loved when someone give them something. Some feel most loved when their significant other spends quality time with them or encourages them (praise) or cuddles (physical touch) with them or helps them with the dishes (act of service).
 - o What is your love language? What makes you feel most loved? All people have a primary love language. Jesus knows your love language. He created your love language. He loves you according to your love language.
 - o We need to take the time to learn the love language of those we are in relationship with and strive to meet their love language needs, even if it is not our love language and it seems awkward to us. Why? Because better love meets real needs.
 - o My mom told Wil before we got married, “There are two things my daughter need to feel loved: attention and praise.” Because my mom loves me, she learned my love languages and tried to give Wil a “heads up.”
 - o Better love meets real needs.
- The last better love action step is what Jesus did on the cross. He gave up his life. He through of us above all and gave his life showing us that better love is heroic.
 - o When you hear of people who do heroic feats and someone interviews them about why they acted with such lack of self-regard, you often hear ordinary people turn hero say, “I didn’t think about myself. I just knew that someone needed my help. I didn’t think about it.”
 - o Heroic love thinks about the other more than about self. That is the definition of being a hero – you put someone’s life above your own.
 - o In our relationships, especially in our marriage relationships, we have opportunities to be heroes.
- I came across a story of heroic love. It is about Robertson McQuilkin. He was the president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary. His wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease.
 - o At first, he tried to meet her needs and still work by hiring a companion to stay with her. But, Muriel became increasingly agitated when Robertson was not around. She was fearful when he wasn’t with her.

- When he would leave for the office, she would go after him, walking the mile round trip route to his office as many as 10 times a day. At night, when he would help her undress, he would find her feet bloodied from walking back and forth between their hours and the college. She became more desperate for him to be near at all times.
 - Many people suggested that he consider putting her in a nursing since she was becoming increasingly more difficult for anyone else to manage. Robertson had to make a decision whether to continue serving the Kingdom of God in his role as president of the seminary or to serve his wife. He chose to resign from the seminary.
- Let me read part of what McQuilkin wrote regarding the time when he resigned. He wrote, "When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised 42 years before 'in sickness and in health...til death do us part?' This was no grim duty to which I was stoically resigned, however. It was only fair. She had, after all, cared for me for almost four decades with marvelous devotion. And such a partner she was! If I took care of her for 40 years, I would never be out of her debt. It is all more than keeping promises and being fair, however. As I watched her brave descent into oblivion, Muriel is the joy of my life. Daily, I discern new manifestations of God's love – the God I long to love more fully."
 - After McQuilkin resigned, he was surprised by the response to his resignation. It prompted husbands and wives to renew their vows. Pastors shared his story with their congregations. He shared his surprise with an oncologist who serves those who are dying. This oncologist told him, "Almost all women stand by their men during situations like this; very few men stand by their women."
- Now, that husband was a hero to his wife. That is heroic love. That is selfless, sacrificial love. His wife got to a point where she could no longer talk in a way that made any sense.
 - But, one phrase she said with great accuracy. "I love you." She would often look at her husband, caring for her, and say those words. I think that her mind held on to those words because she extended such love to her husband and he extended such great and heroic love to her.
 - Yet, heroic love doesn't just have to be relegated to big life-changing sacrificial decisions like that. Heroic love can be expressed every day in the small sacrifices made, the selfless expressions of love. When we make the first move, set someone else as priority, take the risk to reach out and meet their needs instead of demanding for our needs to be met, then we are practicing heroic love. Agape love is heroic love.
- Practicing better love, the agape love of Jesus, is hard work. Commitment is hard work. Often in the messiness of marriage or in the messiness of any relationship, we are tempted to wonder if loving someone in a better way is really worth it. Agape love can hurt. Maybe we should just protect ourselves and our hearts.
 - C.S. Lewis wrote this about love, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung, possibly broken. If you want to keep your

heart intact and protect yourself, give your heart to no one, not even an animal. In order to protect your heart, wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries and avoid all entanglements. Lock it safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But, in that casket, safe, dark and motionless and airless, it will change. It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to the risk of tragedy in giving your heart away is damnation. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all dangers and agitation of love is hell itself."

- Have you tried to protect yourself in relationships? Maybe you have even tried to protect yourself in your marriage. Better love is hard. Yet, Jesus knew that better love is worth it, even worth his very life. Jesus set so many examples of what better love is. Next week, we will look at some more.
 - o Who do you need to love better? How will you do that? What action step that Jesus took do you need to take as well?
 - o Our world needs better love. Our spouses need better love. Our families need better love. Our friends need better love. Not the same kind of affection or superficial love we have toward pizza, but real unconditional, sacrificial agape love. Are you willing to love like that?