

Be Know For Love

Part Four

Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 3:16-18

1. Love is based on need, not worth.

2. Love is passionate.

3. Love is active.

4. Love always costs something.

5. Love shows our love for God.

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Last week I started out the message talking about something called “intelligent disobedience” – it’s what you call it when a seeing-eye dog is being told by its blind owner to do something that the dog knows will harm its owner. The dog is intelligent enough to disobey. If you remember, I applied that to our lives; that we need to be intelligent enough to disobey what the news media and the culture and political candidates tell us to do, and instead we need to be known for love, which is the title of the sermon series we are finishing today.

But there’s another term that I’ve come across in my readings, and that is “learned helplessness.” It is a technical term originally used in reference to animal psychology but is also appropriately applied to human behavior as well.

“Learned helplessness” describes an animal or a person who has learned to behave helplessly, even when there is opportunity to avoid an unpleasant or harmful circumstance. In humans, it is a mental state in which the person believes he or she has no control over the outcome of a situation.¹

An example of learned helplessness would be the tragic and heart-rending case of Jaycee Dugard who was kidnapped when she was 11 years old while waiting for her school bus. Jaycee was held captive for 18 years, living in sheds and tents in the backyard of her captor, even though there were many opportunities to escape. She felt she had no control over her situation.²

When we think about the circumstances of our lives right now, it can seem kind of bleak. We are on the eighth month of a pandemic, and positive cases are on the increase. Your presidential candidate lost...boo...or your presidential candidate won...yay....but either way, the hatred and division in the media, in politics, and in our country’s race relations are entrenched in our society. So you might feel like there is nothing you can do to make a difference in this world. My friend you are suffering from learned helplessness if that is what you believe. This entire series, our church’s mission statement, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Bible, and your salvation experience are ALL telling you that not only CAN you make a difference in this world, you MUST make a difference in this world, and the way you do it is through love; if we are known for love, we will change the world. You *must* believe this is true; you have the power of God through the Holy Spirit himself to change the world through love.

¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learned_helplessness

² From a sermon by Monty Newton, Optimism 101, 10/25/2010

We concluded our last series called “We Are the Church,” by looking at the story of the Good Samaritan. I’d like for us to revisit that story and learn some more from it as we conclude this series today.

It’s become our custom to stand as we read God’s Word. We do that to honor God’s Word, and to help us focus on what it is saying, so whether you are a part of our online campus or here in the Worship Center, would you please stand with me?

Thank you. This is what is recorded for us in Luke’s account of the Gospel.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:25-37, niv)

Thank you – you may be seated. So let me explain a little bit before we go further. We are told that the man who questioned Jesus was a lawyer, but he wasn’t the kind of lawyer that you and I would think of today. He was a lawyer because he was an expert in the Old Testament Law; it might be more accurate to say he was an Old Testament scholar. So when he asked Jesus what he had to do to make sure he could get into heaven, he was asking what the essential commandment was in the law. There’s a really good chance that this guy wasn’t very interested in the answer, as much as he intended to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. You see, if Jesus answered him, then Jesus would be in trouble because he would be saying that the other commandments weren’t important. But if Jesus *did not* answer, then he would come across as inept to his followers. But instead of answering the man, Jesus

wisely asked, "What do you think?" The man said to Jesus, "Love God and Love your neighbor?" Jesus said, "You're right! Now go and do it!"

But the guy *was* like a lawyer, because right away he started looking for a loophole to that commandment. He asked, "Well, then, who exactly is my neighbor?" In other words, he was asking, "Who do I have to love (Implying, 'who do I *not* have to love?'), and how much do I have to love them?" I think that's a question that many of us would ask; it's our nature to try to reduce God's commands to something that doesn't demand too much from us. We would like to believe that loving my neighbor means loving the people who love me back, or at least the people who will do nice things for me in return. That's what the lawyer was thinking.

So Jesus' answer is to tell the man "Someone who loves looks like this...." and then he tells the story. Jesus' story describes what love looks like in real life. He tells the story of a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. That trip was known for being treacherous. The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho is about seventeen miles, descending sharply toward the Jordan River just north of the Dead Sea. The road curved through rugged, bleak rocky terrain where robbers could easily hide. It was considered especially dangerous, even in a day when travel was already full of hazards. In fact, this particular road was commonly called "The Way of Blood." So this is a very believable story to those who were listening.

Here are some lessons that Jesus taught us about love for others. Remember, this is a picture of what it means to be known for love. The first thing we learn is that...

1. Love is based on need, not worth.

Jesus describes a Jewish man who was attacked by thieves, stripped of his clothing, badly beaten up and left for dead. Our love is to be driven not by the worth of the recipient but by the need of the recipient. This man, worthy or not, was in great need.

As this victim lay beside the road a series of three individuals came by, one at a time. The first one to walk by was a priest. When the priest saw the victim all bloody and barely dressed, instead of stopping to help him, he crossed over to the other side of the road and avoided the man. Now, if you know your Old Testament really well, you would say that the priest wasn't allowed to touch the man because it would have made the priest unclean, and then the priest would not have been able to perform his ceremonial duties in the Temple. And you would be right. Except that Jesus specifically said that the priest was walking "down the road." That means he was walking *away* from Jerusalem, which means he had finished his Temple duties and was going home. This was one of the shocking parts of the story. The priest was considered the holiest person that there was. He was taught the Old Testament Scriptures inside and out. He was the one entrusted with offering sacrifices in the Temple on behalf of the Jewish people for their sins. He was one of the select few that could go into the furthest part, the holiest part of the Temple. If anybody would

act like God, he would. But instead, he avoided the guy and went to the other side of the road.

The second guy that comes along is in verse 12 – a Levite. The Levite was sort of like a Church Board member; he was a lay leader in the Temple. This guy was a little better than the first guy, because the Levite came and looked at the victim...annnd *then* walked by without helping. I guess it's human nature to look at an accident like that.

Once as a youth pastor I was taking teens on a bus trip, and we drove by a terrible auto accident with severely injured people – it was a bloody scene. The police and emergency responders were there, but they had just started working. Traffic was getting very thick and very slow on the four-lane freeway, and I talked to our bus driver about getting to the furthest lane away from the accident, but traffic was too thick. We were going to drive right by it. So I asked the driver not to say anything and I would try to distract the teens by making some kind of announcement from a seat on the opposite side of the bus. It was all beginning to work until the bus drove alongside the accident scene and one of our adult sponsors shouted, “Oh no! That's gruesome! Kids, don't look out the right side of the bus, it's horrible!” So guess what the teens did? They did what most people would do; the bus almost tipped over as 40 teens all rushed to the right side of the bus! That's probably part of what the second guy in Jesus' story was doing, but it didn't lead him to stop and help; he just kept walking right on by.

The first two men didn't want to get involved. They didn't want any trouble. Getting involved would be messy. They saw the need but didn't do anything about it. This was a sin of omission; they did *not* do what they should have done. They ignored the need. Their religion didn't make any difference in the way they lived.

Loving others means we have to go out of our comfort zone because loving others is based on their need, not on their worth. And by the way: *every* person has a need. Every person you know, in this church, in your small group, in West Valley, has a need. It might be emotional or physical or relational, for sure spiritual; we *all* need God, and many people need to be introduced to Jesus!

And then, second...

2. Love is passionate.

This is an interesting part of the story, because we don't always feel like loving others, but in Christ we do feel compelled to do it. Our obedience is not based on feelings. We do feel compelled to love others, whether we feel like loving them or not. Let me explain: in Jesus' story, along came the third man. Jesus says he was a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans absolutely hated each other. Jews thought Samaritans were lower than dogs. Calling someone a Samaritan was the same as cursing at someone. Samaritans were considered “half-breed Jews” both biologically and spiritually. It would have been more realistic if Jesus would've said that the Samaritan came along and finished off the injured Jewish man and killed

him – that’s how much they hated each other. If nothing else, this describes blatant racism.

Because of this story, the term “Good Samaritan” has come to mean someone who does something kind for someone else, particularly helping someone out of a troubled spot. But that was the furthest thing from the truth when Jesus told this story. Jews would never put those two words together. To say, “Good Samaritan” was an oxymoron – two words that shouldn’t go together, like “Congressional Leadership.” This was the biggest shocker of the story.

But Jesus said that when the Samaritan saw the Jewish victim, he had compassion. The word that Jesus used for “compassion” in the Greek was a very literal word. It comes from the same word that means “intestines” or “bowels.” That doesn’t mean that the Samaritan had a movement, if you know what I mean; it meant the same thing as when you and I say, “I’ve got a gut feeling.” A gut feeling comes from the deepest part of ourselves; it’s sort of innate. The Samaritan saw this Jewish victim on the side of the road and got a churning in his gut. His heart burned in him for this poor guy, and the Samaritan *HAD* to stop and help him. He couldn’t pass by without helping the man. *That* is the kind of love we are talking about – it is passionate. This love stirs us to go against our nature and against social customs and norms and racism. It stirs us, it burdens us, it troubles us. It keeps us awake at night until we do something about it.

There was no logical reason for the Samaritan to change his schedule and give his time and money to a natural enemy. Of all the people that saw the victim, the Samaritan had *the best* excuse to walk by. He loved because he felt something inside him that said he *must* do something for the man in need. Not because he deserved it or was worth it, but simply because he needed it.

It’s not really so much about how we feel as it is about what we believe. Remember what I said about “Learned Helplessness”? Self-improvement coach and Guru Brian Tracy was talking about it. He sums up that kind of behavior in what he calls “The Law of Belief.” “The Law of Belief” states, “Whatever you believe, with feeling, becomes your reality; you always act in a manner consistent with your beliefs.” In other words, what we believe either inhibits and limits us, or energizes and frees us.

So what do we do when we realize we have learned helplessness behavior? Brian Tracy says the key to unlearning helplessness and learning hopefulness is to replace “limiting beliefs and attitudes” with “empowering beliefs and attitudes.” But you have much more than mere mental determination. My friends, if you are a believer in Jesus, then the Holy Spirit has given you everything you need to change your “limiting beliefs and limiting actions.” The Spirit transforms your heart into a heart of love. You will always act in ways that are consistent with your beliefs. What are your actions, right now, indicating about your beliefs? Are you known for love? Because, quite naturally, then...

3. Love is *active*.

The Samaritan's love was based on the man's need, not his worth, and he knew in his gut that he had to help the man. So he couldn't just walk by. He didn't just feel sorry for the guy. He had to act on it. He went to the guy, bandaged him up, and cleansed his wounds with oil and wine. Oil and wine were considered to have medicinal qualities, and they were pain relievers. They were generally expensive, too. The Samaritan didn't avoid the guy and go to the other side of the road. He went *toward* the guy. If we are to be known for love, we have to move toward people, not away from them or avoid them. Love in action is not going to magically happen in us; God's not going to just overtake you and make you do it against your will. You will always be faced with the choice to act on love or not. It will take effort and it is rarely convenient, but the Holy Spirit will empower your obedience. Keep in mind, if the victim were conscious, he might've rejected the Samaritan's help; after all, they were supposed to be sworn enemies. I am sure the Jew would not have helped the Samaritan if the roles were reversed. Here's the point: sometimes when you love people, they will reject it and they may reject you. But that's not the point. You and I are to love anyway.

Jesus used seven action words – verbs – to describe the unselfish, loving action of the Samaritan. Jesus said he *went* to the man. He *bandaged* his wounds (probably using his own clothes to do it). He *poured* oil and wine on his wounds. He *put him* on his own donkey. That meant the Samaritan had to walk. He *brought* him to an inn and he *took care* of him, including *giving* money.

In every one of his acts he demonstrated love by responding in practical, timely, and unselfish ways. He took the time. He was a man of some means, so he was probably a busy man with things to do and places to go and meetings waiting for him, but he stopped and took at least an hour – probably several hours – to help this guy. Love is active.

Thinking about the state of our country and world, we feel helpless to do anything about it. True, we can't help everyone everywhere. But we can love *someone*.

Someone watched Mother Theresa helping care for the endless numbers of poor and dying people of India. For every one she helped, there were thousands more. The person said to her, "You might as well quit. How will you ever help all these people? It's impossible." Without stopping what she was doing. She said, "You start with the face that Jesus puts in front of you." That's being known for love. That's what matters. Love acts. Love does something. We can't just stand by and do nothing. We love the face in front of us.

But be aware that...

4. Love always costs something.

The Samaritan really went the extra mile. He not only cleaned him up and helped, he personally took the guy to an inn and saw to it that the innkeeper looked out for the guy until he recovered. He gave the innkeeper two silver coins. That was two

whole days' wages, which would have kept the man for up to two months in an inn. If you were to apply that to today it would be at least \$2,000.

Then, the Samaritan promised that he would return and completely reimburse the innkeeper for any additional expenses that he incurred while helping the victim. He left money to take care of the guy's needs and he put no limit on how much he would spend to see that the guy was taken care of. If we are going to be known for love, we've got to accept the fact that it is always going to cost us something. Jesus loves you, and it cost him his life for you. If you and I are going to be known for that kind of love, it will cost us as well, in time, in resources, in money. Even in wearing masks!

Finally...

5. Love *shows* our *love* for *God*.

When Jesus finished telling his story, he asked the lawyer one more question in verse 36 – he asked him which of the three men was most like a neighbor to the victim? Notice that the lawyer couldn't even bring himself to say the word "Samaritan," so instead he said, "the one who had mercy on him." Notice too, the lawyer is left without any excuses. The original question was, "Who is my neighbor?" and Jesus turned it around to, "What kind of neighbor ARE YOU?" Jesus essentially said, "YOU are the neighbor who is supposed to love others," not which neighbor are you supposed to love. YOU are the neighbor who is to be known for your love. Then Jesus said, "Go and do the same thing." Love others based on their need, not their worth, love them passionately and actively and sacrificially. If you do, it will show that you actually love God. If you don't, it will show that you don't love God.

In John's first letter, chapter three, we are given one of the most convicting passages in the Bible when it comes to being known for love.

For this closing, would you stand with me again please, and then remain standing for some instructions. This is what this convicting passage says:

This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear.

My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love. This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality. (1 John 3:16-18, tmt)

If we are known for love, that will show our love for God. Conversely, not being known for love shows something, too; it shows that we do not love God. Religious people will *talk* about love, but then they will do what the Priest and the Levite did –

they'll walk to the other side of the road and avoid loving others. They'll keep walking. But not Christians. We won't be that way. We'll be known for love. We will be people who love others because of their need, not their worth; whether we or others think they deserve it or not. We will be passionate and active, and even though it will always cost us something, we will love others anyway, because that is how others will know that God exists – by the way we love God. That is being known for love.

Now, I want to ask the pastors to come forward. If you did not get a chance to get a campaign button last week, or you feel you need another one, I want to encourage you to come get one; make your coming forward a commitment on your part that you will be known for love, that our church will be known for love. You won't give in to the helplessness you see and hear around you. You and we will be known for love.

Pray