

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday February 13, 2022. "The Genius of Love. The power of love to defeat evil"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're in 2022, a brand new year, and we're excited about where God is leading us. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's area is expanding and we are retooling our student ministry. You can check that out on our social media sites. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Recap.

This series begins with the belief the teachings and truths of Jesus are counter-intuitive. They force us to pull out all of our assumptions and ideologies. Hold them up alongside Jesus's life to see if they're actually from God. Asking; **is what we believe is true, or an ideology, assumption handed to us?** They require courage, humility, the ability to have beliefs, operate your life in those beliefs, and still be open-minded enough to consider different views and perspectives. Our working definition of genius, open for scrutiny is **Genius- to apply a counter intuitive creative solution to a situation or currently held school of thought ... and it works.**

Which means genius implies there is some risk pushing against commonly held protected beliefs or practices with newly discovered truths. Genius also requires the adopters to rethink and reexamine what they thought to be true. These would be our beliefs and assumptions. Genius asked us to shift how we view, understand, and live based on what these people brought to the world. This is the **"since"** we've talked about. Since this is true... our lives need to look like this now.

Last week we talked about the genius and power of the incarnation. The genius of being among, with, others, not just in proximity. Today we talk about the genius of love.

III Sunday.

Sunday we hit the genius of love. This specific topic is loaded, and tough to live out, in our 'might makes right' world. So, a couple of questions before we make two statements.

What is your understanding of the scriptural teachings about love?

Where do you find it easier, and more difficult to practice your understanding of scriptural love?

Two things we want to say before we dive into this specific genius belief. First, we all have assumptions, beliefs, and ideologies that are most likely more worldly based. Nowhere do we find this more than when it comes to a conversation about love. So, we have to be willing to pull out all our thoughts about love, and have the courage to hold them against scripture to see if they hold up. Second, no matter how we define or understand a scriptural understanding of love, we have to admit, it's really hard. If we want to pursue, knowing we all have room for growth, practicing love like the kind described in scripture, we know it will challenge us to live differently than we do now.

Our scripture was used in the same way it was last week. First, to proclaim the truth about love, and then to see Jesus practice it in the way he taught. So, read **Matthew 5:38-48**, the proclamation, and **Matthew 26:50-54**, living it out, and react to the truths presented there.

What jumped out to you from these passages?

What did each reveal to you about the type of love Jesus called us to live?

We really didn't spend a whole lot of time unpacking the specifics of this passage and how to live it. It's pretty evident how we're supposed to live out this love Jesus taught and practiced. Talking about love feels like writing about dancing. Sometimes you can over discuss or explain something that really only happens when we just move outside of our comfort zone and actually put it into practice.

How you wrestle with passages like this. Here are some specific things we mentioned to help you work through and put some context and real life application to processing this.

1. Get in some type of intentional group. Make a commitment to spiritual growth and to others who are also wanting the same. These kinds of topics, and working towards an understanding, has to be worked out, not on your own, or just sitting and listening, but in conversation in community.

2. Grow your ability to honestly consider perspectives you don't hold. Lean into the struggle of running into ideas different from what you currently hold. Embrace working towards truth is tough. Take seriously our ability to be deceived, and challenge ALL the assumptions and ideologies we hold.

3. Learn to ask REAL questions that work to uncover truths. Most of us ask questions, like we look for scripture. To prove what we already believe to be right...THE capital "T" truth. **What is your 'litmus test' to test what you believe, and does it match the teachings of Jesus?**

4. Continually cultivate humility and curiosity. Keep in the FRONT of your mind ALWAYS, the possibility you just might be wrong. So, you can hold onto your current beliefs, assumptions, but you're always open to new perspectives and information. Doesn't mean you have to believe or adopt them. But you're developing a healthy and useful process to find truth.

IV Challenge.

This kind of radical, sacrificial, love is so difficult. You will not come even close to how it looks like lived out, especially in how Jesus did. But this kind of radical, sacrificial love is genius because it causes real change, and makes a significant impact. So the question before all of us today.

What work do we need to do, to push ourselves to learn to love in this way?