



LOVE BOLDLY – GOD & SELF

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... what's your favorite way to show a loved one, any loved one not just the romantic ones, that you care? Do you dive into your bag of "5 Love Languages" tricks... dropping some Acts of Service or Quality Time? Do you write a letter expressing your appreciation or record a heartfelt Snap? Spill the tea!

OPENING PRAYER

**Compassionate Father, thank you for loving us so unconditionally.
Help us to be as kind and loving to ourselves as you are.**

INTRODUCTION

You've put in a good day's lunch, solved all the problems of the world, (well, created a vision statement of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, at least: to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously,) and the sandwich shop is starting to thin out. You've got a solid description of the first characteristic, to *love boldly*. (You decide you need more coffee if you're going to put much effort into the last two.) If a disciple of Jesus Christ is going to love as boldly as Jesus did, it's not going to be easy. It will take a level of *sacrifice* and *commitment* that seems fairly uncommon

in the world today. But when you collect your refuse and stow your notepad and pencil, you notice you're the only one left in the dining area, and a thought hits you... *I've been so focused on loving others, do I truly love God in return? And if God loves me so much, do I truly love myself?* You've spent the first two parts of what it means to love boldly considering how to show *others* that brand of radical love. But in this moment of solitude, you realize Jesus's command to love takes on a new meaning... that bold love shouldn't just extend to others. It should also mean a love for God and, perhaps the most difficult thing, a love for ourselves.

Setup Question: Quick poll... which would you say is the most difficult to do: 1) love God, 2) love others, or 3) love yourself? Don't go too deep into the whys yet, we'll do that later. Just have a quick little debate. Ready, go!

SETUP

Quick review... Let's go over our vision statement from the United Methodist Council of Bishops again. (We'll do this until you have it memorized.)

**The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who,
empowered by the Holy Spirit,
LOVE BOLDLY, SERVE JOYFULLY
AND LEAD COURAGEOUSLY
in local communities and worldwide connections.**

We've been working on the first of these three characteristics, to *love boldly*. Everything Jesus did started with love and so do we. But Jesus didn't just call us to love, he called us to love *boldly*. And that's when makes this command so important, so powerful, and so difficult. Loving

boldly requires so much more than being nice and doing nice things. The revolutionary kind of love to which Jesus calls us requires some truly difficult things... like the *sacrifice* and *commitment* we've talked about the last two weeks. But there's one more element of this that might be the most difficult element of love that we are called to put into practice. But we'll get to that. First...

Question 1: Last week we were tasked with building relationships, seeing the worth in others as Jesus sees them, especially those with whom you disagree. How did that go? How did you do in committing to journeying with others, showing them the love of Christ?

SCRIPTURE

Week 1, we looked at Jesus's command to love others as the disciple John recorded it. Last week, we looked at the version of it written by Luke. Today, we look at the same story that Luke told, but the way Matthew tells it...

Read Matthew, chapter 22, verses 34 through 40.

Luke added a second part to this event, the story of the Good Samaritan. And in it, we found the second facet of what it means to *love boldly*, namely that we are required to commit to building relationships with others, walking their journey of life with them. But when we focus solely on the answer to the question, (verses 37-40 in Matthew,) another facet of *bold love* emerges. See, in Luke's telling, Jesus turns the question back on the Expert of the Law, and it is the expert who answers. In Matthew's version, Jesus answers the question, "which is the greatest commandment?" And thus, his answer becomes a command that we all tend to overlook... let's paraphrase it so it stands out: "Love God... and love...yourself."

Question 2: In Luke's version, Jesus asks the Expert to answer his own question. In Matthew's telling, Jesus answers it himself. Does this change the meaning for you? Is it more impactful one way or the other? How would you have felt were you sitting in the crowd, listening to this exchange? Does anything else stand out to you about this passage?

REFLECTION

On Sunday, Randy gave us a powerful explanation of what this command meant to him and what Jesus intended for us. See, when Jesus gives this command, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and... Love your neighbor as yourself”** (v. 37,39 NIV), we tend to focus on the “love your neighbor” part. In fact, that’s what we’ve done exclusively for the last two weeks. But there are two more commands in there that make Jesus’s brand of love so bold. The first...

LOVE GOD

“Sure, I love God. I mean, I go to church. I stand and sing when the worship leader tells me to stand and sing. Just don’t ask me to raise my hands, though, I’m Methodist.” But is that what it means to truly love God? Well, Randy told us on Sunday that, this is precisely why Jesus expounds and gives us some clues on how to love God as unconditionally as God loves us. Jesus gives three areas that help us return that love: with all your heart, soul, and mind. Randy explained, “These aren’t three separate tasks. They’re deeply connected, like three strands of a cord.” First, to love God with all your *heart* means aligning your deepest longings with God, creating “a steady, burning love that reorients your life.” God wants to be your first love. Second, loving God with all your soul means loving God with your very being, “trusting God with your purpose, your eternity, your innermost self... this is spiritual intimacy.” Loving God

with all our soul means allowing God to mold us into the image of Christ, not perfectly, but progressively... having a heart that says, “I want to be more like Jesus today than I was yesterday.” And finally, loving God with all your mind is one that we may not fully understand at first. Love isn’t just a feeling, but rather includes our thoughts, our intellect, our choices. “God doesn’t ask us to check our brains at the door.” Instead, we are called to engage the world through the lens of our faith... examine, wrestle with, verify things guided by Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. Love God with your entire self: heart, soul, and mind.

Question 3: You can show love for a person through kind acts, a thoughtful gift, spending meaningful time with them, a hug, or even just saying the words, “I love you.” But, these are tough to do with God. So, how do you show your love for God? If someone asks if you love God, your gut reaction is to say, “yes, of course,” but... how do you know? And how do you show it?

“Whelp, we’ve covered loving God and loving our neighbor. We’re done, right?” Not exactly. There’s an implied commandment tucked into these verses that may prove the most difficult of all the already difficult things we’ve discussed. Verse 39 says, “love your neighbor as yourself.” Those last two words imply something we ignore because we find it difficult, scary, vulnerable, even impossible... *as yourself*. There’s a command in here to love yourself. But for many of us, loving ourselves is harder than anything we’ve talked about to this point. We internalize the messages we hear from others, or things we feel about ourselves: “I’m not enough.” “I’ll never measure up.” “If people really knew me, they wouldn’t love me.” But those are not God’s words. God says, “You are my masterpiece.” (Ephesians 2:10 NLT) “You are fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:14 NIV) “You are worth dying for.” (Paraphrase of Romans 5:8) Randy put it beautifully, “to love yourself boldly is to see yourself the way God

sees you—as cherished, chosen, and created with purpose. This isn’t arrogance or selfishness. This is spiritual alignment.”

Question 4: What keeps you from loving yourself? Is there a specific area of your life that makes this difficult? What would it take to see yourself as God sees you... as worthy, as a masterpiece of the Creator? (This can be a difficult and emotional question for some to answer. Be as vulnerable as you feel comfortable and hold space for those who struggle with this.)

CLOSING

As we close this first series on the characteristics of a disciple, to *love boldly*, it’s important to see how it all comes together. Randy summed it up Sunday, “when you love God boldly, you know your source. When you love yourself boldly, you become whole. And when you’re whole and rooted in God, your love for others overflows with power.” Consider this first command of Christ. Are you loving God boldly, or conveniently? Are you loving yourself boldly, or conditionally? Are you loving others boldly, or selectively? Take seriously Christ’s command to love boldly. It might require some *sacrifice*, putting the needs of others before your own. It will definitely require *commitment*, building relationships with those we are called to love. And it is rooted in the command to love God with your heart, soul, and mind, and to love yourself, seeing your worth the way God sees you. Go and love boldly.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**