

INTRO:

—Time and experience has a way of sharpening our understanding of certain concepts (ie. marriage/parenting). As a child, I knew that God loved me, and yet didn't know the gravity of it—SHARE: In my mid-teens, I was the prodigal son who didn't have the guts to leave home and publicly rebel, but inwardly my broken heart began to chase after empty cisterns. My heart hurt, because I put expectations on the God I worshiped, and when He didn't meet my expectations, I labeled Him unfaithful, uninterested, and unloving. —HOWEVER, to save face, I continued going to Church, being exposed to loving instruments of God. —We tend to downplay the power of God's love to be transformational; I emphasize God's love because the love of the world is weak, empty, arrogant, self-serving, conditional, and manipulative, but God's love is good, generous, unconditional, and true. —His love changes people, and in turn changes circumstances. (SHARE: Julia's story—In twenty years of ministry, I have seen hard hearts softened by loving people in a non-judgmental/ non-condemning way). —I have to believe that Christ and His church is the hope for any people or society to flourish, and if that's the case we must love as Christ loves, but frankly I feel we don't; but hold grudges, withhold forgiveness, and wish ill will on people. Often this is motivated by fear and when we lead with fear, we end up objectifying people—they're simply a problem to deal with or ignore, instead of seeing them as an imager of God who needs help. —Love doesn't objectify, but exposes a person and draws them back to their humanity, in hopes that they might see their creator.

MOVEMENT 1:

Jn. 13:34-35 *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you MUST love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* —**1 Jn. 4:7-8** *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

—**If you want to see God make all things new, love others the way God has loved you, but you will always love others to the degree you've experienced the love of God yourself—often by how other Christians have loved you**. When I hear Christian say, "I hate them," or I see Christians hold resentment against someone, I question to what degree they've known and experienced the love and grace of God themselves, because when you've experienced His love and forgiveness, why wouldn't you pass it on? —**How you love others is directly related to how you've experienced the love of God in your own life.**

—RETELL ACCOUNT: **Lk. 7:36-40**: Jesus anointed by a sinful woman. —The Pharisees see this and are upset, they can only see this unclean and sinful woman who is ruining their dinner, and yet Christ sees her heart and love. —**Lk. 7:41-47** *A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44 Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." **He who is forgiven little loves little, but he who is forgiven much, loves much!** —This woman understood the weight of her sin, but also understood the greatness of God's love and forgiveness, which drove her to a radical act of worship that didn't care what the onlookers thought! When she encountered the crazy love of God, what she did seemed crazy in the eyes of others.*

—SHARE: As a covert rebellious teen, as I continued to go to church and surround myself with people who pursued me in genuine Christlike love and affection, I came back to my senses that God hadn't given up on me. In the battle for my devotion, their love became the sword that cut through my double-mindedness and wayward ways. —I was in a battle, and love became the greatest weapon to free me from the bonds of death

and slavery to sin. My heart was captured in a radical way. I couldn't get enough of Him, His word, His Church, and I had this burning desire to show this love to everyone! **When God's crazy love captures you, you'll love in a way that seems crazy to others!**

MOVEMENT 2:

1 Jn. 4:11: *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* –While we were sinners, Christ displayed His love by dying for us! While Christ hung on the cross, he pleaded with the Father to forgive those who mocked and crucified him (Stephen, too; Acts 7). –The bar is high on how we must love others! – Sadly, **a Christian who withholds the love that God has lavished on them, takes away an opportunity for God's love to change someone else through them.**

—As followers of Jesus we are in the business of planting seeds and watering seeds, and we do this through sacrificial acts of love; first and foremost it *must* start with your family (spouse/children), and then love your neighbor! Now, in order to pick and choose who we love, we might ask the same ancient question, “Who is my neighbor”...just hoping it's not *that* guy, but as Christ informs us through the story of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), your neighbor is truly anyone you cross paths with. Love them, because they are loved by Christ.

—How does this really look when we apply it to our lives? **1 Cor. 13:4-7** *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* –This is a lovely verse for a wedding day, but it hits differently in the marriage 20 years later. This is a lovely verse for a married couple who is love struck already, but apply this type of love to your enemy, your abuser, the antagonist, your boss, that one relative, the person who uses you!

—Practically how do we love well? **FIRST: Be devoted to scripture, prayer, community, service**—disciplines that connect us to God and His love for us. **SECOND: pray big prayers concerning love:** Help me to know your love God! Help me to see others as you see them! Help me to love others as you love them!. **THIRD: Love your neighbor by 1) Love others with respect**, and *IF* they don't want your love, don't throw pearls to swine, but keep praying for them—even if they're your enemy. **2) Find real needs and meet them** (lonely/visit, hungry/feed, process/listen) **3) Love in truth**—say hard things with a heart for the person's salvation and sanctification. **4) Be postured to forgive.** **5) Never give up on people** (seeds—God saves and grows). —**We are to love others as Christ loves us, so others may know the power of His love too.**

CONCLUSION:

—SHARE: 18 years ago, I was deeply hurt by someone from my former Church; this person made some terrible choices that broke their family, the Church, and the impacts of their actions made ministry difficult for years. —I had forgiven this person long ago, but not been in contact with them since the time of the offense, and then they texted me out of the blue this past October. —Ignore the text? Just text back? Go above and beyond and talk on the phone—hear where they are at?. —I chose to be a reminder of God's love. God wants to use us as a conduit of His grace, an extension of His love, an expression of His heart.

—**Loving others as Christ loves us, creates the best potential for people to be drawn to the Father of that very love!** —Who is God calling you to love better, usually it's the person who's been hardest to love.