

**Mission: Love People**

February 9, 2020

**Daily Devotions****Day One– In the Image of God**

In this most recent sermon, Dan preached about Jesus' instruction for us to love people- something everyone agrees with, right? I don't think anyone hears this and immediately thinks, "No thanks! I'm good. Loving people? Not my thing!" No one says that. But there are subtle things in our lives that get in the way of us loving other people (think: pride, ego, selfishness, prejudice).

When we talk about loving people, one of the first things we need to understand is that all people are created in the image of God.

Read Genesis 1:1-27.

In Genesis 1, God speaks the universe into existence. He creates the wonders of far-off galaxies and the beauty and intricacies of various flowers and trees.

Then, in verse 24, God begins to create beings that move, and breathe, and run, and hunt, and eat, and reproduce. And in verse 25 God says, "it is good".

Verse 26 sees a shift in the creation narrative. "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness... so God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Are you familiar with the term *Imago Dei*? In Latin, it means "image of God" and is used to describe humanity.

Genesis 1 teaches us two vital ideas:

- 1. People are made in the image of God.**
- 2. People have a higher nobility than anything else in creation.**

Pause and think about these facts for a moment.

- What are your thoughts, feelings, and questions about being made in the image of God? Write what comes to mind.
- What are your thoughts, feelings, and questions about possessing greater nobility (worth, value) than any of God's other creations? Write what comes to mind.

One of the shortest and yet most profound verses in all the Bible is this simple sentence: We love, because he (God) first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

Any love we have to give flows directly from our understanding of just how we are loved by God.

In love, God designed us to bear his image.

In love, God gave us freedom to make choices.

In love, God rescued us from our choices through Jesus death and resurrection.

In love, God invites us to love others with the love he gave us.

“God’s unfailing love for us is an objective fact affirmed over and over in the Scriptures. It is true whether we believe it or not. Our doubts do not destroy God’s love, nor does our faith create it. It originates in the very nature of God, who is love, and it flows to us through our union with His beloved Son.” - author, Jerry Bridges

“Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God’s love encompasses us completely. He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken.” - business executive and Christian leader, Dieter F. Uchtdorf

It boils down to this: you can’t love people with the love of God, if you don’t believe God loves you.

- What makes it difficult for people to trust in God’s love for them?
- Do you believe in God’s love for you? If so, spend some time specifically thanking him for the ways you have seen and experienced his love.
- If your belief in God’s love wavers with your circumstances, spend time confessing that and ask God to increase your faith and open your eyes to his unending love for you.

## Day Two– *That Person?*

We learned yesterday that each and every person is created in the image of God... but we also know someone we'd deem *that* person. You know who I'm talking about- we see them coming from down the hall, down the street, across the church lobby, and we inwardly groan.

Our minds begin to race: *Did they see me? Did they see me, see them? Is there someone nearby I can start a conversation with before they get to me?*

But alas, there they are in front of us. So, we force a smile, say "hi", engage in a little chit-chat, and intermittently look for the quickest way out of the encounter.

We all know *that* person... But I'd challenge you to ask yourself a couple of these questions next time you see them coming down the hall.

What makes us want to avoid them?

Is it *their* attitude that's the problem, or is it actually ours?

Is it *their quirks*, or our *lack of humility* forgetting *we have quirks too*?

Is it that they stand too close, make awkward comments, have bad breath, or have hurt us in the past?

Maybe. Or is it about our preference to be around people we know and like?

Jesus is kicking off his ministry with an amazing message in Matthew chapters 5-7. And some of his words are very challenging. Read Matthew 5:46-48 from the Contemporary English Version:

"If you love only those people who love you, will God reward you for that? Even tax collectors love their friends. If you greet only your friends, what's so great about that? Don't even unbelievers do that? But you must always act like your Father in heaven."

Ouch. Notice that this was not a suggestion, but rather a command from God. God commands us to love difficult people. When we love difficult people, it's a sign that we understand how much God loves us. But it's not easy.

Yesterday we were reminded that we are created in the image of God (the *imago Dei*), that God loves us more than anything else he created. For us to "act like our father in heaven" we must learn how to love all people like he loves us.

- Who in your life (family, a co-worker, neighbor, brother or sister in Christ) is difficult to love? Write down any names that come to mind.

God's commands are rarely easy, but they are important. Here are five ways to grow in your ability to love *that* person.

### **1. Pray for your own heart.**

Ask God to soften your heart towards this person, to put off anger and irritability, to put on meekness and kindness, to understand this person's struggles and meet them with compassion (Colossians 3:12-14).

**2. Pray for them.**

Ask God to be at work in their hearts, drawing them to himself and helping them see how much he loves them (John 3:16-17).

**3. Move toward them, not away from them.**

Although our tendency is to steer clear of *that* person, try intentionally moving toward them. Find ways to engage them in conversation, like meeting them for coffee or sending them a text.

**4. Give them grace, just as God gives grace to you.**

Remember God's grace poured out for your own daily sins. Ask God to help you bear with them and love them well (Colossians 3:13).

**5. Realize that, you too, could be the difficult person in someone else's life!**

Have you ever considered if you're the thorn in someone else's flesh? Don't be oblivious to your own shortcomings and sins.

God will be honored, and our hearts will find deeper contentment as we seek to love people just as Christ loved us when we were his enemies.

## Day Three– *Those People?*

Yesterday we worked through what it looks like to engage *that* person in our lives... But what if *that* person is actually *those people*? Hear me out: have you ever considered the idea that you might be prejudiced? (Not the way you thought this devotional would start, huh?)

Truth is, we are. The word prejudice has Latin origins and means to “pre-judge based on opinion”. Still doubting if it’s true of you? Consider this:

- How do you determine the quickest line to get into at the grocery store?
- How do you choose what to wear?
- How do you decide where to sit at church?
- How do you choose a doctor, what car to buy, what career path to take?

Based on previous experience, research, or sometimes just a hunch, we “pre-judge” decisions all the time.

According to Psychology Today, Dr. Eva Krockow suggests the average person makes 35,000 choices a day. If you sleep an average of seven hours daily, that’s over 2000 choices every waking hour! And many of those choices are based on what you have “pre-judged” about a situation or a person.

Few people walk around proudly exclaiming, “I’m prejudiced!” That’s a stigma we want nothing to do with. The truth, though? We all make pre-judgements about people before we really get to know them based on any number of factors:

- Appearance (think: clothes, hair, skin color, physical attributes, tattoos, piercings)
- Behavior (think: introvert/extrovert, speech accent, arrogant/insecure, habits)
- Status (think: car, home, income, job, influence, success, followers on social media)

And the list could go on... We do this based on our experiences and our opinions which makes it incredibly difficult to love them that way Jesus loves them.

Read Luke 7:36-50.

I love this story! Imagine the scene: Jesus is eating dinner one night when a prostitute comes into the home, kneels down at Jesus feet and starts weeping, drying her tears with her hair. Then she anoints Jesus with expensive perfume (very likely bought with the money she earned working).

Don’t miss these two important facts:

1. While the religious people began passing judgement, Jesus forgave her sins.
2. Those who claimed to know God saw her like *they* wanted to see her, but Jesus saw her for who she truly was... a child of God in need of hope and forgiveness.

Yesterday we were challenged on our tendency to avoid difficult people. Look at the people Jesus *went out of his way to interact with*: prostitutes, tax collectors, hypocrites, lepers, criminals, outcasts, the poor, the hurting, the needy, and the rejected.

- Spend time with God and ask him to reveal your prejudices. Who are *those* people to you?
- Spend time confessing prejudices you have. Confess them knowing that God will forgive (1 John 1:9).
- Like going to the eye doctor to fix a vision problem, spend time asking God for new eyes: the eyes of Jesus. Pray that you would see all people, particularly the people you have pre-judged, like he sees them.

## Day Four– As You Love Yourself

In 2015, Justin Bieber released a song that has over 1.3 billion streams on Spotify.

“Love Yourself” is about a relationship that ended because one person was self-absorbed.

So, because they couldn’t love the other person well, the Biebs suggested “you should go and love yourself.”

While many do struggle with a healthy sense of self-worth, our problem isn’t usually loving ourselves enough. It’s *only* loving ourselves.

As humans in a fractured world, we all struggle with self-absorption. And this keeps us from loving people in a God-honoring way.

Look at this painfully accurate assessment of the effects of self-absorption in our culture from Psychology Today:

“Our relationships are damaged, sometimes irreparably, by a self-preoccupation that undermines the closeness, or intimacy, that all relationships require if they’re to be nurturing and resilient. Constant self-absorption undermines our capacity for empathy and true understanding of the thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires of others. It’s extremely difficult to clearly appreciate the world that exists outside ourselves when most of the time our focus is directed inwards.”

When Jesus was asked which commandment was greatest, he gave a two-part answer:

1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (which we covered in last week’s life group content).
2. And love your neighbor as yourself.

So, is Jesus telling us to literally love others like we love ourselves? Or is Jesus challenging us to see others as equally valuable in God’s sight? The answer is probably a bit of both!

If there’s one glaring area we can grow in, it’s learning to love others like ourselves.

- How does trusting that God loves you fuel your ability to love others?
- What keeps you from loving others well? Is it busyness, prejudice, or preferences? Does something else come to mind?
- How can you minimize self-absorption and maximize loving *that* person and loving *those* people?
- Read Luke 10:30-37. What characteristics of the Samaritan need to be true of you in order to love others well?

## Day Five– Unconditional

So many marriages today are struggling because of the 50-50 principle. I don't know where we learned this, but many have believed the myth that if one person brings 50% and the other brings 50%, together, they'll create a 100% healthy marriage. And friends, that just isn't the truth.

The 50-50 myth actually leads to:

- Keeping score
- Being critical
- Complaining about needs not being met (think phrases like “it's not fair”)
- Resentment
- Bitterness
- Trying to fix each other

Essentially, it leads to conditional love.

Read this verse three times. After each time reading, write any thoughts that you have. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

Some Bible translations exclusively link this verse to marriage. However, in context, this verse instructs us how we should approach all relationships.

Look at the breakdown of this verse:

Submit- to give up one's own right or will for another  
...out of reverence for Christ- out of fear, or terror, or dread of standing before God in judgement.

Notice this verse does *not* say submit to one another *only* if they submit to you.

Our ability “to give up our own rights” for others is not conditional on whether we get that back in return but based on our reverence for Christ alone.

It's a simple yet incredibly difficult task: unconditional love for all people.

That's what honors God. That's what will connect people to Jesus. That can change the world!

- Take time to pray to God. Do you need to confess “conditions” you've placed on loving others? Or thank God for his unconditional love for you?
- Meditate on 1 John 3:16. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.
- What do you sense God saying to you about how you love others?
- What is one way you can grow in showing unconditional love?