

Real Love: The hardest person to deal with

Message for Sunday, June 17, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Children's Message:

Ahead of time:

- Sign "God" as God's signature on my lower leg.
- Make t-shirt with the message, "God made me, and God doesn't make junk." Wear it for the worship service.
- Have a painting or photo with creator's signature on it

Show a painting, or a picture of a painting. "Who painted this picture?" One of them will hopefully answer. "How did you know that? Did you see him/her paint it?" – No, an artist signs his/her painting. They do that because they made that painting with love and care, and they are proud of their special work.

Roll up my pant leg to show God's "signature." What does that tell you? [Have fun with this. Obviously I wrote that, not God. But it means the same: God made me.]

I know that because the Bible tells us that.

Psalm 139:13-14, New Century Version:
You made my whole being; you formed me in my mother's body.
I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way.

God made each one of us, and God made each one special. That's why I wore this shirt today: "God made me, and God doesn't make junk."

Repeat after me:

I am special.
I am wonderful.
I am loved.
I know this because God made me.

Message: "Real Love: The hardest person to deal with"

1) Who needs enemies?

A few weeks ago in this series on "Real Love," we looked at Jesus' command to "Love your enemies." I can't say that I have any enemies. I've done things

and said things which have offended people, who no longer support me or associate with me. But I wouldn't say they are *enemies*. But even if there were people who sought to make life difficult for me, I am comforted by this fact: none of them will ever make as much trouble for me as one person in particular. This person has caused me grief time and again. Oh, this person talks a good talk, makes all kinds of promises to not do it again; but then betrays me. To find the greatest trouble-maker in my life, I don't have to look any farther than the end of my nose. I see him in the mirror every morning.

Can you identify with what I'm saying here? I want to overcome some habit. The harder I work at it stopping it, the more I do it. My biggest problem is myself; I don't need to worry about others.

What about you? Is there a weakness in your life where you regularly stumble? Some sin that seems to have your number? Have you ever cried out, "O God, I wish I wasn't like this!"?

That's the cry that Paul makes in this passage in Romans.

Romans 7:15-17, New International Version:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

I look back on some of the dumb things I've done, and I cringe. I remember saying things which I thought were clever or funny, but it was a disaster. There are so many things in my life which I regret; I wish I could live those days over again, but I can't.

We're all in the same boat. We all have things like that. In fact, some people go to the extreme of feeling hopeless, useless, worthless.

Jesus tells us to love others... *and ourselves as well.*

Matthew 22:37, New International Version:

"Love your neighbour as yourself."

So how do we love this person who causes us such trouble, such heartache?

2) You can love yourself—God does!

Paul concludes that passage with this glorious truth:

Romans 8:1, New Living Translation

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

No condemnation! This is good news! Fantastic, wonderful news!

People may condemn you, put you down, and say all kinds of terrible things about you. Don't listen to them. You might even condemn yourself; don't listen to that, either. Listen to what Jesus says:

John 3:16-17, New Living Translation:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.”

The Bible says that God will *convict* you of sin. Jesus mentioned this when he promised the disciples the Holy Spirit would come to them.

John 16:7-8, New International Version:

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”

But “convict” is not the same as “condemn.” Convict says, “What you did was bad.” Condemn says, “*You* are bad.” There's a huge difference there.

Convict says, “Change your ways; open your heart to God, to come in and heal your sin.” Condemn says, “You are a bad person from start to finish. You are so bad that no one could ever love you, and even God hates you.”

I like the way that Rick Warren puts this:

You can't fully understand how to love other people until first you understand how much God loves you. You cannot offer to other people what you don't possess yourself. You can't be gracious to others if you haven't felt God's grace. You can't be merciful to others if you haven't felt God's mercy. You can't be loving to others unless you understand how much God loves you. When you get that, when you feel it,

when you understand the incredible, audacious, indescribable love that God has for you and you feel it in your life, then you're going to be a whole lot more loving of other people.

I would just add, “and a lot more loving of yourself.”

3) You can forgive yourself

I talked earlier about carrying around the load of baggage, of all the stupid things we've done. That doesn't help anything at all. It's wise to *learn* from our mistakes. It's not wise to keep on shaming ourselves for those mistakes, for years afterwards. Part of loving others is to forgive them. We can do the same for ourselves. God forgives us, so we should be able to forgive ourselves.

Isaiah 43:25, Good News Bible:

I am the God who forgives your sins,
and I do this because of who I am.
I will not hold your sins against you.

4) You can believe in yourself

Psychologists tell us that your self image, how you see yourself, is largely determined by what you think the most important person in your life thinks about you. So many people are walking wounded because their parents said, “You're a failure. You'll never amount to anything.” Or your spouse says, “I can't stand being around you anymore. I'm leaving.” Or someone else...

Here's what you need to do: you need to make Jesus Christ the most important person in your life. It really doesn't matter what others say. What matters is, what does Jesus say about you?

John 15:5, New Revised Standard Version:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

Mark 9:23, Good News Bible:

“Everything is possible for the person who has faith.”

It would make a fascinating Bible study to go through the Gospels and find all the places like these two where Jesus says, “I believe in you.” Together with Jesus, we can do great things for God.

Fred Craddock is a pastor. He tells the story of the time he was vacationing in Gaitlenburg, Tennessee. Fred and his wife were seated at a table in a restaurant and an old man came up to them and asked, "Are you folks on vacation?" "Yes," said Fred, "and we're having a good time." The old man said, "So, what do you do for a living?" Fred said, "I'm a preacher." "Oh!" said the old man. "Let me tell you a preacher story."

He sat down by them. The old man said, "I was born an illegitimate child. I never knew who my father was. It was very, very hard on me growing up. The kids in school made fun of me. Growing up, I didn't have any friends at all. When I walked around our little town I always felt people were staring at me and looking at me and saying, 'I wonder who's the father of that boy.' I spent a lot of time by myself. I didn't have any friends. One day a pastor came to town. Everybody was talking about how good he was. I had never gone to church but I decided I'd go to church and hear this guy. So I went. And he was good. So I kept going back. But each time I went to church I'd come in late and I'd leave early so I wouldn't have to talk to anybody. Then one Sunday I got so caught up listening that I forgot to leave early and the service ended and the people stood up and I couldn't get out the door. Suddenly I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder. When I turned, that big tall pastor was standing there with his hand on my shoulder looking at me and he said, 'What's your name, son? Whose boy are you? Whose son are you?' I just shook when I heard those words and I heard that question. But before I could say anything that pastor said this, 'I know who you are. I know who your family is. You have a distinct family resemblance. You're the son of God!'" The man said, "You know, those words changed my life."

The old man got up and he left and a waitress came over a little bit later and said, "Do you know who you were talking to?" Fred said, no. She said, "That's Ben Hooper. Two time governor of Tennessee."

A man learned he was the child of God and it changed his whole direction. It changed his destiny. Because God loved him as his own child, he was able to love himself. It didn't matter what the other kids said; all that mattered is what God said.

Here are the questions for you today:

- Will you love yourself?
- Will you forgive yourself for all those dumb things?
- Will you believe in yourself?
God does!