



March 25, 2018

Palm Sunday

Reverend Aaron Gordon

“Building a Lifestyle of Love” *John 12:12-16, Luke 6:27-36*

— The crowds on Palm Sunday loved Jesus for a minute, until he disappointed them. How can we not be like the crowds, but rather, like Jesus in our relationships? This week’s principle of loving is that lasting love requires a lifestyle change. [This is the sixth and final sermon for Rick Warren’s 40 Days of Love Campaign.](#)

Palm Sunday is a strange day for us. It appears joyous and festive with the palm branches waving and singing Hosanna. But it also marks the beginning of an epic misunderstanding that filled the crowds in Jerusalem with hate toward Jesus. The Israelites expected Jesus to be a military leader. He was not. It won’t be long until the Israelites that are shouting “Hosanna!” Are shouting, “Crucify Him!” What a contrast!

For a people whose first and primary command is to Love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, these people in Jerusalem sure miss the mark! When God came to them as Jesus, they could not sustain a loving relationship with him.

Over the past 5 weeks, we have been going through Rick Warren’s 40 days of Love campaign. With sermons and small groups, we have been learning how to love like Jesus loves. Real love is difficult, but it is worth having more than any other thing in this world. Rick Warren took us through the famous love passage in the bible, 1 Corinthians 13. You know this one, “love is patient, love is kind, etc.” As we examined the attributes of real love, we learned that love is often much different in practice than people think. Real love is difficult to sustain because it requires consistent hard work. But here is the thing, listen to how the love passage in 1 Corinthians ends, “[love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, Love never fails.” The kind of love that will build fulfilling, Godly

relationships isn't a temporary thing. It is a love that lasts through even the toughest challenges. Love never fails.

Today we conclude our sermon series on Love by looking at how we can sustain real loving relationships over the long haul. We will need to cooperate with God to sustain love. Anyone can white knuckle it and love well for a while. But how do we cultivate deep, rich loving relationships with God and one another over years and years? How do we build love that lasts?

The answer is that we build a lifestyle of love. That means that instead of simply perfecting the skills of what we do to love God and others well, we integrate these practices into our lives so they become habitual ways of being. Being a good lover over the long haul requires us to adopt an intentional lifestyle of love.

This same principle applies to anything we want to be good at in our lives. If you want to be a good golfer, you have to have a lifestyle where you play golf and practice your swing often. If you want to be in shape, you have to have a lifestyle where you regularly work out. Love is no different. In order to be a great lover, you have to have a lifestyle where you regularly practice habits of real love.

No matter how much knowledge we have about love, if we do not put it into practice, it does not matter. As we read in 1 John 3:18, "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

Today we will look at some biblical ways that we can build a lifestyle of real love that lasts.

The first way we can build a *lifestyle of love that lasts* comes from our scripture in Luke, verse 31. "Do to others as you would have them do to you." You may have heard of this teaching. It is often called the "golden rule." A way to practice the golden rule in our lifestyle is to develop a habit of taking the other person's perspective.

In a relationship situation, we take the other person's perspective when we try to imagine what it would be like to walk in their shoes. By taking the perspective of another person, we can imagine how we would want to be treated if we were in their shoes. Practicing the golden rule will fulfill all the requirements of real love that we read about in the Bible.

Additionally, when we practice the golden rule, we are able to meet the needs of one another.

Everyone has needs. A relationship will only have real love if there is a give and take in meeting each other's needs. Taking the perspective of others helps us to see what needs they might be experiencing that we might be able to meet. We need God's direction here to make sure that we are not projecting our own thoughts and needs onto someone else. Prayer helps with this.

One concrete practice that helps us to take another person's perspective is to have a physical prayer list for people you are in relationship with. It can be written on a white board, a piece of paper, or even in an app on your phone or computer. But the list can't only be in your mind. The list can contain names, and brief things to pray for about the person. If you habitually maintain this list and pray for the people in your life, God will use your prayers to get you thinking about the other person and their needs. This will help you to see things from the other person's perspective. When you pray through your list, you can also ask God to help you to understand their needs well, and you can ask God for the strength to be able to meet their needs just as you would like your needs to be met. If both people in a relationship developed this lifestyle of intentionally meeting the needs of the other, no one would ever go with their needs unmet!

Unfortunately, a lifestyle of love that includes perspective taking and meet the other person's needs can be difficult to find in human beings. We are sinful and selfish people. We focus on our own needs. This tendency can destroy love in a relationship. This was the problem with the Israelites in Jerusalem who welcomed Jesus, waving branches and shouting "Hosanna!"

This crowd of people had needs to be free and to be saved from the Roman occupation. When it became clear that Jesus was not going to meet these needs, the self-centered crowds turned on Jesus. They could not see things from Jesus's perspective. If they had spent their lives developing a loving lifestyle, they might have been able to accept Jesus as he was, with love. Instead, their selfishness turned them into enemies of Jesus.

This leads us to a **second way** that we can build a *lifestyle of love that lasts*. This practice is to get in the habit of loving our enemies. If we practice loving our enemies, like Jesus commands us to do, we will develop a lifestyle of love. No

other practice of love is more challenging, or more rewarding than loving an enemy. This is mainly because, when we forgive and love our enemies, they are no longer enemies as far as our actions show. In this way, love destroys hate.

Now, we might not like our enemies, or what they choose to do. But we can make an active choice to love them. We can make this choice into a habit that we practice our whole lives long. We can choose to practically love our enemies by turning the other cheek, and giving them our shirt when they take our cloak, and lending them things without expecting to get it back. This is what Jesus teaches. We can build these practices into our lives.

One important word of caution here is that Jesus is NOT telling us to be doormats. When someone struck you on the right cheek in Jesus's time that was a well understood insult. It wasn't necessarily someone trying to violently harm you. Cheek slapping, coat taking, and lending are very personal situations, but not the same as if someone was violently attacking you or breaking into your house to steal your possessions. The meaning of these verses about enemy love is meant to be RELATIONAL and personal. It is not intended to address complicated geopolitical problems like war or situations of domestic abuse or life-threatening violence.

Jesus teaches that to love our enemies, we must be vulnerable in our relationships when people hurt us personally. We are called to love those who do wrong by us relationally. The opposite of enemy love is holding a grudge or cutting someone off in an attempt to punish them for their transgressions. Loving our enemies means that we don't take revenge for the hurts they do to us.

Let me give a concrete example. Harold and Maude used to be the best of friends. They were always hanging around together in school, and they ran with the same crowd. Well Maude developed a crush on a young man named Chuck who was a year ahead of her. Of course she told Harold about it. Because he wanted to feel important, Harold leaked the information around the whole school. Everyone teased Maude, and she felt terrible. She knew that Harold had told everyone.

Some of her other friends suggested that they get revenge by spreading rumors about Harold. One of her friends even wanted to sneak out at night with Maude and toilet-paper Harold's house. But Maude refused. Instead, she told Harold how much he hurt her. She refused to take revenge and she stayed in

relationship with Harold instead of shunning him or not talking to him again. She never did tell Harold about any of her crushes again though.

The story of Harold and Maude is an example of enemy love in a relational context. This is what Jesus is teaching about.

One concrete practice that helps us love our enemies brings us back to our prayer list. Include your enemies on your prayer list. Draw a line to separate them out if that helps you. These enemies can be people who are your “frienemies” meaning that you are still on speaking terms, but there is unresolved hurts and revenge in the relationship. These enemies can also be people who have cut you out of relationship or declared openly that they are against you.

These enemies are on your prayer list so that you can pray one specific prayer for them each time you pray. That prayer is for God to bless them, and for God to remove any desire in your heart to entertain revenge against the enemy. Making a habit of praying this prayer for your enemies is probably the most practical action you can take to love your enemies. God will use this to help you act in loving ways when you run into your enemies in your life. God will use enemy love to build up all your relationships. Sometimes, are most significant relationships are formed with people who used to be our enemies.

Before we wrap up this morning, I want to talk briefly about a third way that we can *build a lifestyle of love that lasts*. The last is to get in a habit of refreshing your love tank. Each of us is a limited human, and the only way we can love like Jesus, is to be filled up with the love of God. The saying goes, “you can’t pour from an empty cup.” It is true because loving like Jesus loves uses up vast amounts of our spiritual, emotional, and physical resources.

These three areas of our lives must be re-charged in order for us to be good lovers, and to build a lifestyle of love. Rick Warren does a great job of explaining how to create habits that re-charge us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I encourage you to check out lesson 6 in the 40 days of love series on YouTube for more information. In summary, we each need to carve out time in our schedule for activities that refresh us physically, like eating a balanced diet, resting, and exercising. We each need to carve out time in our schedule for activities that refresh us emotionally, like solitude, recreation, and laughter. We each need to carve out time in our schedule for activities that refresh us spiritually, like a daily

quiet time, small group meetings, and worshipping God in a worship service. The scriptures tell us that Jesus constantly practiced these habits that refreshed his love tank, so we ought to do the same.

In fact, I doubt Jesus would have been able to love us all the way to the cross, without cultivating a lifestyle of love. Jesus practiced the Golden rule, “Treat others like you want to be treated.” Jesus prayed for his enemies. Jesus refreshed his love tank. And Jesus gave us an example of how to build a life of loving that always perseveres. Not even death can overcome this kind of love.

If we follow Jesus’s example, and build a lifestyle of love, we will be able to love like Jesus loved. Our lifestyle of love can keep us from being the kind of people who turn on one another when emotions get hurt, or when needs go unmet. This is what happened to the crowds in Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday. Let us not be like them. Instead, let us ask God for the power to love others like Jesus.

Here is my prayer for us, “Loving God, you gave us an example of real love in your son Jesus. Help us to have the strength and the resolve to build a lifestyle of this kind of love, so that we can experience the best relationships with you, and with each other. In Jesus name, Amen.”