

05/06/12

Getting to the Core #4 - Figuring Out Who You Love

- imagine it was your responsibility to prepare a group of 2,000,000 people to go from where they are today, to where God wants them to be in the days ahead...
 - and let's assume that your words have to be somewhat succinct—because there is no way to provide mass copies of your speeches to every person involved...
 - and so you have to be able to boil it down to the bare essentials...the summary of the summary of the summary...
 - here's what you really need to focus on to get to where God wants you to go next...
 - here's the essence of it...
 - what would you say?...how would you boil it down?...
 - and how would you make it equally applicable to someone who was young and someone who was old?...
 - how would you state it so that the greatest percentage of people possible embraced the message and actually got to the destination the Lord desired?...
- now, I realize that you might say – well, that's never going to happen so let's just cross that off the list of things I need to be concerned with today...
 - not so fast...
 - you are involved in getting people from where they are to where God wants them to be...that's true of every person in this room...
 - now I realize that might be time for a corporate “nuh-uugh”...
 - but please hear me out...
- you have at least one person you're responsible to get from where he/she is to where God wants them to be?...right?...
 - the person whose skin you're wearing...
 - and just think about this – we're constantly talking to ourselves...we're planning, we're thinking, we're evaluating, we're strategizing...what is all of that?...
 - it's the establishment of a path...formally or informally...
 - you can't get out of bed in the morning without that...
- but for many of us – the list is certainly longer...and people you're supposed to be helping to get somewhere...
 - for those who have an immediate family...part of your responsibility is getting everyone from where they are today to where God wants them to be...
 - and I'm not suggesting you have a big speech about that with charts and graphs and power-point slides...but your daily conversations and your daily interactions are either proactively establishing a path—hopefully that is good—or just allowing everyone to establish one on their own by default that may be anything but good...
 - so if you were going to summarize that direction – into an elevator speech so to speak – where you can only give the absolute essentials...what would it be?...
- then there's the people you work around...and in times of casual conversation at lunch or while traveling or whatever...you have a way of influencing...of informally guiding...
 - the same is true with your extended family...or in the community groups in which you serve...

- for some it's a large group of employees...or some sort of a club...or a particular ministry...but you are going to have a part in getting that person or group of persons on a particular path and to a particular place...where is it?...and how well are you doing at living and articulating the speech?
- with that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible to Deuteronomy chapter 6...
- page 137 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- we're in the middle of a series right now... **Getting to the Core -- Six Weeks to Focus on Things That Matter Most...**
 - we started by focusing on - **Figuring Out What You Believe**
 - then, **Figuring Out Why You're Here**
 - last week we tackled **Figuring Out Who You Are**
 - Our assignment today is ... **Figuring Out Who You Love**
 - that will leave us with **Figuring Out What You Want...and**
 - **Figuring Out Where You're Going...**
- one other note – next Sunday is also Mother's Day...so we've be dovetailing several elements of our service to that important theme as well...
- now our passage today really helps us answer the question we've posed...because this is at the end of the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel...
- Scripture tells us that the previous generation that God miraculously brought out of Egypt and experienced the parting of the Red Sea and who received the blessing of the ten commandments chose not to obey the Lord and take possession of the promised land...
- it was an incredibly sad day in the history of God's people...and the consequence was that practically every adult between 20 and 60 except people like Caleb and Joshua had to die in the wilderness because of their unbelief...
- Moses also will be forbidden to actually go into the land because he struck the rock out of anger and robbed God of the glory due His name in the wilderness...
- but now those 40 years are practically over and Moses gives a series of speeches intended to prepare the next generation for the opportunities and challenges that went along with the conquest of the promised land...
- guess what he's going to talk to them about?...
 - the importance of figuring out who you love...
 - let's listen in...**read Deuteronomy 6:1-15...**
- we're talking this morning about Figuring Out Who You Love...and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 steps to wisely choosing the object of your affection.**

I. Understand Key Principles of Love Biblically.

- we're going to be back in this passage in a few minutes to do more detailed study of what we've just read but I'm concerned that may not have the practical impact that's intended unless we don't first try to lay background from other places in the Scripture...
- Moses told them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and all their might...that would go right over the head of a person who didn't have some level of familiarity with the concept of biblical love...
- so what can we learn from other places in Scripture to give us insight into exactly what Moses meant here?

A. It is a choice.

- sometimes our culture gives the impression that love is more like a mud-puddle...
- it's something you fall into unawares...you have very little choice in the matter...
- you were walking along innocently...and a little cherub jumped out from behind a tree and shot you with an arrow and whoever you saw next was the person with whom you would fall in love...
- Scripture assigns you a far less passive role in the process...
- that's why Moses lays this out the way he does...this is a core issue – everyone needs to get this right...and it's a choice that needs to be made...
- love the Lord supremely...love the Lord exclusively...like nothing else in your life...
- that's why the Bible also commands us not to love certain things...because that would be the wrong choice...
 - **1 John 2:15-17 - Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.**
- a passage like that wouldn't be in the Bible unless this particular issue is an actual choice that people like you and me make...
- by the way – you might even begin to ask yourself – what choice have you made in this matter and what impact are you having on the way other people in your life make that choice?...
- some parents don't understand why their children don't love God as they get older and one possible answer is that they were immersed in a lifestyle of love for the world...if our homes are like crocs, we shouldn't be surprised if our kids are like pickles...

- biblically speaking, love is also...

B. It is a sacrifice.

- fundamentally love is a choice to give...to sacrifice in order to obtain or meet the needs of the object of your affection...
- sure, feelings follow – but that is always the caboose on the train...it starts with a choice to give...
- **John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**
- **Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.**
- there is no such thing as biblical love without the genuine payment of a price...
- that's why one of the defining symbols of Christianity is the cross of Christ...
- there's no greater love than Jesus dying for our sin...
- but also no true proclamation of the gospel without understanding that in trusting Christ, you are choosing to take up your cross and follow Him...
- not because your sacrifice saves you...but because your salvation will motivate that kind of sacrifice for the God you now love...
- choose wisely so you can sacrifice well...

C. It is an investment

- we mentioned this passage last week...but it contains an important principle for what we're studying today...
- **Matthew 6:19-21 - Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**
- all of this is a reflection of what you value...
 - when you treasure something, you naturally invest in it...
 - and over time that's where your heart is...
 - our family enjoys pro football...
 - the anniversary present Kris and I purchased for one another the last several years has been Direct TV's special NFL package...
 - our family went to see a pre-season game at Soldier field last fall...
 - some of you would never do that because you don't like football...but you probably invest in things that I think are a bit zany too – which goes along with what we're saying...obviously on a less significant level I hope...
 - but you choose what you love...you sacrifice for it in certain ways...
 - and you find your heart gravitating toward that object...

- one other important idea...love is...

D. It is a path that can be followed or forsaken.

- part of the challenging aspect of this topic is that biblical love has a shelf-life
 - it's either cultivated or it can be lost...
 - here's one sad example...a man named Demas...he's actually mentioned positively in some of the lists the apostle Paul gives of his faithful team members...
 - **Colossians 4:14 - Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.**
 - you read that and say – great, there's a guy that loves God...
 - **Philemon 24 - as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.**
 - same here – what an encouragement that must be to Paul...
 - **2 Timothy 4:10 - for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.**
 - here's Paul at an extremely difficult time in his life and ministry...
 - and Demas has now deserted the cause at one of Paul's greatest times of need...why?...because he changed allegiance...he loves this present world more than loving the things of God...
 - probably the most chilling example is in one of the seven letters Jesus writes to the churches of Revelation...
 - do you remember this...**Revelation 2:2-4 - I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.**
- so, biblical love is a choice, it's a sacrifice, it's an investment, and it's a path that can be followed or forsaken...now, let's plug all that back into what Moses said in Deuteronomy 6...it's pretty straightforward, isn't it?...

II. Choose to Passionately Love God.

- we refer to these verses as the shema – from the Hebrew word to hear...

A. The Shema

- and as we said earlier, much of this book is filled with speeches that Moses gave to prepare the people for the promised land...
- but this portion of the core of it all...
- so much so that even today many orthodox Jews recite this passage at least twice a day...
- some have even taken this literally and placed the verses in a small box and tied it around their heads...the Pharisees in Jesus' day did that...
- **Deuteronomy 6:4-5 - Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**
- now, why would Moses summarize it all like this?...of the hundreds and hundreds of other issues he could have raised at a time like this...why the focus on one's love for God?...
 - we all know the answer to that, don't we?...
 - because if we love God – if that aspect of our core strength is in place...so many other issues will fall right in line as natural outgrowths of our affection for the Lord...
 - and conversely – if love for the Lord is not in place...all of the rest of this will become drudgery and performed in a half-hearted fashion and probably not at all...

- now, something else we have to bring into this is –

B. The foundation of our love for God

- is His love for us...
- no one here could say, well, God made me go first...
- or, the Lord didn't give me sufficient reason to love Him...
- Moses is actually going to explain that in the very next chapter...
 - **Deuteronomy 7:7-8 - The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.**
 - that's the same emphasis we find in the NT... **1 John 4:10 - In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**
 - our love for Him is always responsive to the way He has chosen to relate to us...

- can I just pause and ask you to think about the question that I hope has already been rumbling through your heart and mind...

- do you love God?...have you figured out who you love?...would your answer be consistent with what we're reading in this passage?...
- can you think of ways that your love for Him was evident this week?...in the past 30 days?...

C. The nature of our love for God.

- you might ask – what does the outworking of this passage look like?...

- there are all sorts of answers to that question...

1. Passionate worship

- **Psalm 5:11 - But let all who take refuge in You be glad, let them ever sing for joy; and may You shelter them, that those who love Your name may exult in You.**
- if someone was standing next to you during our worship time this am [and somebody probably was], would they conclude – that person really loves God...
- not just in corporate worship – but in private worship as well...do you know why so many people here have an established habit of opening their Bibles and praying to the Lord regularly – practically every day?...it's because they love the Lord...
- communing with Him is as natural as breathing...

2. Continuous thanksgiving

- **Psalm 70:4 - Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; and let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified."**
- When you love someone, you're going to want to think and talk about the way that person has blessed you...you just want God to be magnified...
- another clear emphasis in Scripture is...

3. Corresponding love of righteousness and hatred of evil.

- **Psalm 45:7 - You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of joy above Your fellows.**
- the reason that many people here would say – I don't watch that kind of thing on TV not because of some sort of legalistic check-list – but just because it contradicts my love for the character of God...
- I can't love Him and laugh at that...

- one of the major emphases in Scripture is the relationship between love for God and...

4. Joyful obedience.

- there are verses like this all over the Bible...
- **Psalm 119:159 - Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness.**
- **John 14:15 - If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.**
- this is the primary emphasis in our core text here in Deut 6...
- the way you show your love for God is your faithful commitment to His Word...

- now, let's go back and ask our question again...when it comes down to this aspect of your core...of who you really are – have you figured out who you love...is there genuine evidence that you love the Lord your God?...

- I realize someone might say – I'm not sure I can use a personal possessive pronoun in that sentence...I'm not sure He's my God...
- if that's your condition this morning, I'm glad you would acknowledge it...
 - we already mentioned one of the great love verses in the Bible – John 3:16 – For God so loved...
- here's another one -- **Romans 5:8 - But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**
- if you've never accepted God's gift of love for you – why not do so today?...
- it requires a personal relationship with Him to be able to respond in this way...

- now, what about...

D. The extent of our love for God.

- the passage is pretty clear, isn't it?...

- **Deuteronomy 6:5 - You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**

- how many times does the word "all" occur in that text?...

- none of will meet this text perfectly in this life...but it goes back to what Jesus said about the church of Ephesus...

- somewhere along the line, they left their first love...their chief love...their highest priority...

- can I ask you – are there things in your life that somehow have taken that position?...

- what is there about your life that is consistent with these verses for which you can thank the Lord?...

- and what would need to change so that you were moving more in this direction?...

- now, what about the broader question we used at the beginning this morning – the issue of influencing others...

- I can just hear the parent here saying – we are so busy, how are we ever going to crank this into our ever growing schedule?...

- Moses really helps with that piece...it's the key phrase...as you're going...

- **Deuteronomy 6:7 - You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.**

- we're not talking about adding to your schedule – but using the events in your schedule as opportunities for everyone to grow in their love for God...

- praying before meals...

- taking a trip to Lowes – talking about how good God is to provide for your family so you can have a home...

- on the way to a ball game – thanking God for health, prayer for an opportunity to be a witness...

- other sports events

- out in the woods – praising God for His creation...

- being passed by an ambulance – praying for the EMT's, medical people at the hospital, the person involved...

- also – look for ways to serve God together as a family...cf. some teens growing up around here who are already to the place where they could lead aspects of CFE, or the LN, or the Passion Play...because serving God and loving Him is just part of their family's DNA...

- when you figure out how to practically take steps of growth in this aspect of your love...then what's the other half of the equation?...

III. Choose to Compassionately Love People.

- many times when this passage is quoted in the NT, it is placed in tandem with what naturally flows out of love for God...and that is, love for people...

A. Jesus' explanation of the two great commandments.

- **Matthew 22:35-40** - One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a *question*, testing Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “**YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.**’ “**This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’** “**On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.**”
- that shows why this particular topic has to be included in a discussion of core strength...
- Jesus said that the entire law comes down to the issue of figuring out who you love...
 - loving God and loving others...

B. Especially loving those in need.

- we won't develop this today because when we get back to our study of the Gospel of Luke, we're going to look at this passage in much more depth...
- but it's interesting that in Luke's explanation of a time Jesus spoke about this...one of the listeners spoke up... **Luke 10:29** - **But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**
- this gets down to a very important emphasis for us this year...because growth in Christ is often worked out in community...
- that's why we said at the beginning of the year that one of the three aspects of **Core Strength -- Shoring up foundational areas in our walk with Christ and our church ministries that comprise the basis of godliness and effective community service**
- what we mean by that is – being the kind of church where it is easy to be and feel connected...
- plenty of examples of men and women loving their neighbor...