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THE SPIRITUAL HABIT OF LOVE
Luke 10:25-28
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Do you know anyone who does not want or need to be loved?
Think about how you feel when you feel unloved.
Then think about how you feel when you feel loved, when you know
you are loved, when someone loves you.

Can we all agree that we are made for love? Unfortunately, a lot of people learn to live without love. A lot of people look for love in all the wrong places. There are some people who are simply mean, not because they don't need love, but because they never expect to receive love. But when love happens, it is like someone throws a switch in our hearts. Love is what puts the hum in our engines.

I'll never forget a woman named Marie. Every day of her life she would go to the nursing home to visit her mother. It was a small town and Marie could pop in whenever she wanted to. She would take the church bulletin and newsletter and read them to her mother. She would read the Bible. She would show her cards sent by friends and talk to her as if they were having a normal conversation. The only problem was that her mother could not talk back. Something happened in her brain that turned her speech into gibberish. No one knew if her mother understood anything that was said to her. But that didn't stop Marie from trying to communicate. One thing Marie always told her mother was "I love you."

One day, Marie called me, and I could hear both excitement and tears in her voice. She said I needed to come quick to the nursing home. She wanted to tell me something just unbelievable that had happened. I rushed over, actually thinking the worst, but when I entered the nursing home room, Marie's face was lit up with the glow of God. "You'll never guess what happened!" she began. "I was sitting here reading the church newsletter to Mama. And clear as day, she looked at me and said, 'I love you.'" Marie broke into tears again. But she went on. "Mama said it only once, but I heard her say it, 'I love you.' That's all I needed to hear."

In that room at that moment, I was standing knee deep in love. Marie and I had no doubt it was from God.

Love happens. Love moves us. That is why we are focusing on love as a spiritual habit of the heart. **This week we will see how the Holy Spirit wants to turn us into lovers.**

In Luke 10:25-28, Jesus goes so far as to link love with eternal life. Now I want us to think about eternal life, not only as a place we go to after

we die. I want us to think about it as a quality of life, a kind of life that we can experience even now. It is the kind of life we get only from God.

Here is how Jesus links love and eternal life.

One day, a lawyer decides to put Jesus to a test. That sort of thing was becoming par for the course. Lawyers represented the religious establishment. Their job was to discredit Jesus. So they went around asking questions that would prove the incompetency of Jesus, maybe embarrass him. Maybe people would stop following him and start listening to them again.

Now, on other occasions lawyers had asked trick questions like, "If a woman marries seven times because her husbands keep dying on her, whose wife will she be in heaven?" Let me refer you to Mark 12:18-27 to see how Jesus answered that one.

This lawyer in Luke 10 decides to stick to basics. "Teacher," he says, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now if Jesus had said something like, "Believe in me," or "Come follow me" or "Bow down and kiss my big toe," the lawyer would have jumped all over him.

That's not what Jesus does. Jesus thinks, "Hmm, a lawyer. Let's see. He knows the Bible forward and backward. Let's see what he thinks." Don't you just hate asking a question and getting a question back? What's worse, don't you hate getting a question from someone who already knows the answer? "You know what's written in the law (the Bible). What does it say?"

This guy is sharp. If he doesn't answer Jesus, he will seem to be the one who can't be trusted. He doesn't have to refer to his PDA that has 40 different versions of the Bible on it. He doesn't have to thumb through the index. He's an expert on the Bible. He has taught adult Sunday School for years. They have memorized this passage in church. Without hesitation, he spits it out. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

Pretty proud of himself, I think. In fact, Jesus is impressed. This lawyer has actually taken two passages from the Torah, the law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, and combined them to come up with his answer. "You are so right," Jesus says. But then he adds, "Do this and you will have eternal life."

Let me tell you something. When Jesus said, "Do this," here is what the lawyer heard. It was like a tack puncturing a tire. "If you ever actually did this, if you ever got around to doing it, loving God with every part of your being and loving your neighbor as yourself, you would have life like you've never had it before. It would be like heaven on earth, not only for you, but

for all the people you keep judging and condemning because they are different from you.”

Jesus might as well have said all you need to do to have eternal life is to climb Mt. Everest by walking on your hands backwards. It is one thing to know what is required. We know what the Bible says. It is something else to do it.

Let me prove my point. When was the last time you loved God with every part of your being? Any part of your being? We are talking about passionate devotion. Desert mystic Carlo Carretto said, “I have long known that if I want to be happy on earth I must fall madly in love with God.” When was the last time you were madly in love with God?

Have you ever wondered which neighbors we are supposed to love as ourselves? If so, I think you might be missing the point. Just a tad shy of the kind of love God requires. Have you ever justified not loving certain neighbors? Hmm! Might as well try walking up Mt. Everest on my hands backwards. Might as well kiss eternal life goodbye.

The truth is, all of us are hopeless in this love thing until we know the rest of the story.

I recommend that you go home and read I John 3:11 through 4:21. Let me summarize it. John says that the only thing that can enable us to love the way Jesus commands us to love is by knowing that God first loves us. This is the core of the nuclear reactor of love. This is the fuel that fires up love.

You know what happens when someone loves us. If it is an important person in our life who loves us, we are likely to do whatever that person wants. We are likely to feel a new energy, a new life, springing up in us. We will praise that person and seek to be near him or her. We will do things we never thought we would ever do, not in a million years. We will even try to walk up Mt. Everest on our hands backwards if they ask us too. Ain't love wonderful?!

Isn't the gospel of Jesus Christ wonderful?! John says what you need to know and experience before you try to take the first step out into the big world where love is needed is that God first loves you. God is love. It is God's nature to love, and God created you because He wanted to share His love with you, and because He wants your love in return. God loves you so much that He proved in His Son Jesus that nothing, absolutely nothing could ever make God stop loving you. Not even your sins. Not even your darkest thoughts, your worst dreams, your misguided life. Not even your efforts to abandon God, to hide from God, to deny God. God pursues you like the Hound of Heaven because you were made for love.

The One who could crush you, who has every right to abandon you at the gates of Hell, instead . . . loves you. And as a sign and promise of His eternal love for you, He gives you the Holy Spirit to help form within you the habit of love.

I have found that loving like Jesus wants us to is hard to do on a day in and day out basis. I must confess that I have many unloving thoughts, I say many unloving things, I fail to love someone who desperately needs God's love through me. Instead of being madly in love with God, I am just mad sometimes. Instead of loving others as myself, I just love myself. God knows this about me. That is why God has given me the Holy Spirit.

Jesus commands us to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. Let me suggest three steps to take in situations where love is called for: First, stop and thank God that He loves you. Second, ask the Holy Spirit within you for the gift of love. Third, take action to show that love. And you will have eternal life.