

BOUNDLESS LOVE

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“All you need is love, blah blah blah blah”, the song goes, or something like that. The refrain continues again and again. Is this true? Who would deny the importance of love after all? The tune is, indeed, a catchy one, and the idea is enticing. Actually, we live in a world where vast numbers of folks hold to some sort of “love” ethic. “Make peace, not war”, some say. Others phrase it a different way, but embrace the call to love. Yet, we live in a world that clearly does not spend the coinage of love on a daily basis. Murder, rape, divorce, theft, war, physical assault, verbal assault, etc. What gives? Have we understood love correctly? Can love be defined? And if not, how can we embrace such a vague, albeit sweet, idea? Don’t you just *love* these kinds of questions? Well, I suggest that love is all we need, however, love must be defined appropriately. If love is to be real it must be based upon a realistic foundation.

We are told in scripture that it is the love of God which draws us to repentance. We are told in scripture that we ought to follow the Ten Commandments as if they are, well, commands, and not suggestions. We like to hear about “love”. We do not like to hear about “commands”. As one friend recently told me, “I don’t like to be told what to do...and I don’t know very many people who do”. This same person, not too many hours later, reflecting upon circumstances which could have resulted in a difficult outcome, but which seemed to have worked out for “good”, commented, “God loves me”. Yes He does.

Isn’t it interesting that we acknowledge God’s love so readily, yet, find it so difficult to accept the clear instructions of His love? Another friend just sent me an email telling me of an interesting encounter. Apparently, this friend of mine had recently forwarded one of my writings, via email, to the members of a small group. When the small group met in the days following the email one of the participants, a woman, commented on her thinking regarding boundaries and truth. It seemed that this woman was forced to rethink her idea of boundaries after reflecting on the issues brought up in my writing on the subject. As she commented, “I just have never been able to view boundaries as a good thing. I now see how good it is that God would create a safe boundary zone for us”.

The love of God is an amazing thing. This is easy to embrace. The difficulty lies in our inability to really understand or even desire to understand what Godly love is and looks like. We live in a culture that “loves” many things. You have heard people say, no doubt, “I love cake”, or “I love ice cream”, or “I love football” or “I love John”, or “I love Sue”, or “I love jazz”, and so on. The biblical definition of love, the only true definition of love in reality, has been largely lost. The Bible tells us, “God is love”. Therefore, if we are to ever know, understand, receive, and express love, we must know who God is, what He is about, how He has revealed Himself to us, and what implications this has in our lives. Seems easy enough right?

In the pages which follow my aim is to attempt to offer a glimpse of the boundless love of God which is so utterly captivating that it is able to transform everything it touches, including us. If we are to ever have a chance at living the life we were meant to

live, it will only take place if we are able to grasp just how life altering the Love of God really is. As we take this journey together, it is my hope and prayer that the magnificence of the Divine Lover of our souls will envelope us, capture us, win us, and re-make us into the love-centered beings we are intended to be.

Undone: Truth Revealed in Love

In the book of Isaiah, chapter six, we find an episode which unpacks for us the foundational realities of divine love. Here we find out who God is, who we are, and what a difference this awareness makes. Here we find that despite our ungodliness, God loves us. Here we find that this love for us equates to a plan for our life. In seeing ourselves as we really are before a perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful, and holy God, we are tempted to think we are done in once and for all. Yet, what Isaiah finds, and what we find, is that when we allow the truth about us to awaken us to reality, we are ready to stand before a forgiving God who is willing and able to make us new and usher us into great work.

The flood of relativism in our society attempts to drown us in the waters of apathy as it regards character and truth. The majority of us seek to determine our “own” truth depending upon the moment and our desire for comfort. Convinced of our own “goodness” we don’t want anyone to suggest to us that we are compelled to follow any moral standard which judges our actions. Isaiah, in stark contrast to this kind of philosophy, and a man of upstanding character, finds himself far short of the mark of godliness as He stands in the presence of a perfectly pure and loving God. His response? He is totally undone. He comes apart at the seams, and He cries out to God for a change of heart.

Understanding His Love Amidst Difficult Choices—Abraham and Isaac

Sometimes the call of love does not seem to make much sense. Yet, as we venture forward in trust of His loving character we find, in the end, the He knows what He is doing and we find that what He is doing is for our good and for the good of others. What appears at first to be a mockery of common sense turns out to be the brilliance of the Divine Strategist. Choices we make define our future. If you doubt this, just ask the man or woman who went against God’s will for marriage about their level of peace and harmony. As has been said before, more than any other decision we make, the choice of a spouse will largely determine whether our future on this earth is heaven or hell.

The intentional direction of the will toward God’s best for us, even in the face of all the misguided emotions and passionate feelings which rage inside of us, will always result in our finding the life we were meant to live. To follow the emotions in defiance of biblical principles is to court destruction. To be leashed to feelings which are not in keeping with biblical character is to invite needless pain. We can trust God’s good intentions for us. To choose any course of action contrary to His leading is to open oneself up to momentous regret.

Message In A Bottle: Rapturous Love

The romance of God's divine love is expressed in His letter to us: scripture. If we are to know and walk in love, we must know Him. Fundamentally, we come to know Him through His letters. It is this expression of the heart of God which let's us know we are the apple of His eye, the crown of His creation, the love of His heart. As we ponder the lyrics of His love song to us, we discover that no greater love can be found in the entire world. His love is one that arrests our desires, enthralls our senses, and directs our wills to choose to move in His direction.

His love, which seeks us out, results in our passionate pursuit of Him. We will travel the world to find this kind of love. When we see Him for who He is, the result is plain to see. We want Him. In ever increasing amounts, we want Him. We want His plan, His will, His statutes, His blessing, His agenda, His goals, His relational patterns, His justice, His passion for the lost, His plans for our marriage, His parenting skills...we want all of Him.

40-Love: Love inside the lines

Operating within God's plan for us is the only path to victory. A life worth living is secured only when we play according to the rules of the game. And this should make us HAPPY. As tennis, basketball, baseball, football, real estate negotiations, and every significant transaction we find ourselves in has clearly defined lines within which we must play in order to secure victory, so too, a life worth living is found when we play the game of life within the boundless love lines God draws for us.

Everything and Mrs. Jones

My Everything

Michael Buble's new album features a song entitled "Everything". The song is wonderful, and the lyrics are absolutely dazzling.

One cannot listen to the song or read the lyrics without hungering for that kind of experience. Who among us does not desire an intoxicating love such as this song describes? But how many have found it? Few, very, very, VERY, few.

But why? Why are so many movies and songs replete with this kind of utopian love, and yet, life so void of anything close. It just seems that the heroic love ideal, man or woman, does not exist. She either has *this* or *that* but not both. He either brings *this* or *that* to the relationship, women suggest, but not *all* of it. Who has *everything*? Beautiful women are a dime a dozen, but who kind find the woman of external and internal beauty? Women point out that strong and handsome men are plentiful, yet, few find the guy that is captivating physically, emotionally, and spiritually. She has enticing eyes, but cannot *see* in a spiritual sense. He can make a living but has no clue what *life* is really about. The woman can maintain her body, but she cannot even begin to tend to a relationship. The man can rule a company, but does not even care what his troop at home is doing.

Again, our only hope to experience the kind of love we all crave, that *everything* kind of love, is through a relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ. The scripture is clear on this one.

His love is better than life. His ways are higher than our ways. His precepts are worth more than fine gold. In His laws we find delight. His truth is sweeter than honey. These are just a few of the lyrics found in the Bible, God's song book to us. As we read the Psalms, Proverbs, the parables of Jesus, and the poetry revealed in the Bible, we find the heart of God toward those He has created. It is here we find that He is our everything, and it is here that we find the passion and desire to abandon loveless acts which destroy our lives and the lives of others. In our quest for the *everything* kind of love our only hope to experience such a rare gift is in turning to God to experience it first which enables us to extend it to and receive it from others.

Me and Mrs. Jones—an affair to forget

If we are to live a life which avoids the disastrous pitfalls of a Me and Mrs. Jones scenario we must pursue a life of fidelity, purity, loyalty, and commitment. What the catchy tune behind Me and Mrs. Jones does not reveal, is the emotional turmoil, the soot of moral filth which lingers in the soul, and the aching awareness of dishonesty which robs us of the joy of life. We cannot forget, also, the hearts that are destroyed along the way. The initial electricity eventually morphs into a dull stinging pain. The overwhelming tidal wave of romantic feelings always gives way, in time, to the pressures of life. And the pursuit of greener grass is revealed to be merely an exchange for a different lawn, weed-infested at that, which must be maintained. Those few minutes or few hours swimming in stolen waters become the very axis of evil with overtakes us emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and relationally.

Hesed-Loving Kindness and Inspiration

In a recent American Express print ad, Ellen Degeneres tells us a bit about herself. Like Tiger Woods, Roger Federer, and so many other celebs that have appeared in these ads, Ellen gives us a little view of what makes her tick. We are told in the ad that when Ellen was a child her ambition was to work with animals. We are also told what inspires her. For me, this little part of her bio was the most telling. Not only does it tell us something about Ellen, but it tells us something about all of us, and about love. So, what is it that inspires Ellen? Kindness. Sounds simple and less than philosophically inspiring at first glance doesn't it? But allow it to sink in and you will identify with her. Kindness inspires all of us. We all agree with the bumper sticker which reads, "Mean people suck". The opposite is equally true. Kind people rock. Kindness is a quality of God's love. It is kindness, whether we are serving God or we are far removed from a Godly lifestyle, that we all take note of in others.

One of the major themes of the Old Testament as it pertains to God's character is that of "hesed". "Hesed" is that character, that quality of God, which refers to His loving-kindness. "Hesed" is the favor God extends to us that is totally undeserved. We cannot earn it, He just offers it.

The extent to which we demonstrate kindness to others tells a great deal about the state of our heart and the capacity we have to love. A returned phone call, a door held, a chair pushed in, a loving touch, a sincere prayer, patience amidst the failure of another...each of these acts and countless others demonstrate the extent to which we have experienced and embraced the loving-kindness of God. The kind of love we *extend* to the

guy who cuts us off in traffic is an indication of our understanding and experience of God's love. More often than not, we tend to "extend" appendages rather than love, don't we? We are told that it is by the love we show that people will recognize us as followers of Jesus. The goal is for us to be asking, with increasing frequency, whether or not our actions are telling of a heart for God.

Free at Last: freedom to love

"He who the Father sets free is free indeed". The love of God is what sets people free. There is no other force known to humankind which is able to transform a human personality like the love of God. It is His love which healed the leper. It is His love which raised Lazarus from the dead. It is His love which re-made Saul the murderer of Christians in the early church into Paul the apostle who wrote the majority of the letters of the New Testament. It is His love which embraced the Prodigal. It is His love which called out to the Roxanne's of His time calling and empowering them to turn off the red lights and setting them free to walk into the light of Christ and experience the loving caress of God's tender love. It is His love and ONLY His love, which will set you free from those patterns of relational, chemical, and emotional addiction which have entrapped you for decades. It is His love and His love alone which makes us free at last.