

SEEING ONLY GREATNESS

Week #2 of the 7-Week Series, "A Year of Love"

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Okay! So my question for us tonight is: What is love asking of you? Because we think and we know that love is a free gift. It's a gift from God. And we think that there's no expectation; there's no requirement. There's nothing really asked of us. But love asks a lot of us! And when we back away from that -- when we try to pretend like it doesn't -- we kind of miss out on some of the best parts of life.

And so my question for you tonight is: specifically in your life right now, what is love asking of you? Where are you being asked to love in a bigger way? Where are you being asked to love in a way that maybe you don't want to? Maybe there's a place where you just want to keep your heart kind of safe and under control. And Spirit's saying, "*No; it's just time to pop your heart all the way open.*"

Because, over and over again, what I want you to see is that love asks us to be the best version of ourselves. See, what I talked about last week is -- as we moved into this year of love -- I talked about this idea last week that love is really of God. And when we say that we love, it's not really accurate. We don't really love; what happens is we open our heart, and the infinite love of God flows through us. And it feels like it's coming from us, but it's really divine in nature.

There's only one love, and that's God's love. And the love that we open heart and love begins to flow out into the world. And when we open our heart inwardly toward ourselves, then love flows into us. But it's all ... it's all God love!

When we read in 1 John 4:18, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears has not yet been perfected in love.*"

So how many times in your life -- in the last week, in the last day, today -- have you experienced any level of fear? Any level of worry or upset? And what I want you to see is that love is trying to perfect us into a higher, greater version of ourselves. And every time fear calls us, or judgement calls us, to close our hearts, we have not yet been fully perfected.

And the perfection of us is the expression of God's love. That we are actually made perfect as we just decide to open our heart all the way and let love flow to every person in every situation. When we think we're safe; when we're worried that we're not safe ... that we just open our hearts all the way and let love flow.

You know, this year -- 2022 -- I've dedicated the Wednesday Night Service to this year of love. And I want to thank everybody who watches us online. I got so many comments; if you want to email me: rrogers@untiyphx.org. If you didn't like it, there's a "d" in Rodgers; if you did like it, there's no "d." **[Rev. Rogers and congregation laugh]** Alright? **[Laughs]** No; there's no "d" in Rogers. Right?

But I really want to thank all the people who are watching us online and responded. Because this year -- 2022 -- it's a triple-2 year. And 2s are all about love and relationship. And this is our year to really perfect love!

See ... **[Laughs]** Okay; this is where I'm going to get "woo woo" again. So just hang on. I'll be back in a minute. Alright? **[Congregation laughs]** But I just ... Right?

So the first millennium was a 1 millennium. And a 1 millennium is all about the individual. It was us coming into ourselves. And when we look at what happened over the last -- the first thousand years after Christ -- was that we saw a lot of hierarchal structure that was based on one person being in charge, and everybody else was small and insignificant.

Over that thousand-year period, we watched in our country, we watched in our culture ... we watched an empowerment of the "we." That, in the first millennium, it was all about "me." In this second millennium that we're in now, it's all about the "we." That we move from the individual to the collective. And we learn how to be in love. We learn how to be in higher forms of relationship. We learn how to create together. We learn how to do it in ways that we can't even imagine now. Because right now we're just taking baby steps into collective activity, right?

So the first millennium was all about "me," and it was collectively about us learning to be the best version of ourselves. But the 2,000s are all about "we," and how do we come together. How do we love each other? How do we create together? What are higher and higher forms that we can stand together?

So as we move into this year, last week I gave you five homework assignments. **[Laughs]** And I never give five homework assignments! Like, I'm trying to just get you to one! But last week I went all the way. So those five homework assignments that I'm just going to add to, until you just decide it's too much. Five homework assignments.

The first one is -- and I made you do a "pinky swear" last week -- was: no matter what, we are not going to add conflict. Right? That there's enough conflict in the world right now. The first step is: don't add conflict. Don't poke 'em if you don't need to poke 'em. **[Congregation laughs]** Don't need to upset them just because you know you can. Right? Don't get into discussion just because you want to tick them off. Right? We don't need any more conflict right now! So the first thing that we all took a little pinky -- get your pinky out! We all took a little "pinky swear." Don't add conflict.

Second one that we also talked a lot about last week was opening your heart. And just the act of opening your heart begins to heal and restore us.

The third homework assignment from last week was: I wanted you to pick one person this year that is your "person of love." And this might be a person that's difficult for you to love, or you don't want to love, or maybe you don't even like very much. This is going to be your person this year, over and over, to come back to as your person of love. And really practice opening your heart to them, whether you like it or not **[laughs]** to see if you can really be perfected in this activity by having a person to love.

The fourth we talked about: no matter where you are in the world this year -- no matter what's going on with you at the grocery store, the highway. Whether you're in the parking lot, whether you're at work. Wherever you are, how can you add more love? And the whole thing -- the fourth point -- was just add more love. Wherever you are, whatever is going on in your life, add more love. Add more love! Whatever it is, just add more love.

And the fifth point was: one of the aspects about a triple-2 year is that it's a time for profound healing. Not just for the world, but for us, individually. And this year it's a time for us to heal our deepest wounds. And so, on this triple-2 year, I invited you to open your heart and allow the deepest pain that you're still carrying with you -- invite love right there. Invite God right there to heal your deepest wound, so that we get to move on. That we're no longer carrying our deepest wounds into every new experience. We're healing our wounds. And especially our deepest wound. That this triple-2 year -- the power of this year -- really is designed to heal your deepest pain. Whatever your deepest pain is, this year we open our hearts and we allow the love of God into that activity.

Alright! Now let's go to this week.

So if you had to say three things that Jesus taught ... and some of you have heard me say this before. If you had to say the three things that you think Jesus taught over and over again, what would those be for you?

For me, the three things that Jesus taught over and over again. The first one was love. Like, over and over again, he said love. But his definition of love was huge! He wanted us to love the people who were

easy to love and the people who were hard to love. He wanted us to be generous with love in people that didn't deserve, that we don't want to. His definition of love was very big! Because he was this messenger of love.

So his first teaching, I believe, is that he taught a new paradigm of love that was so far beyond the cultural norm of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." When he was teaching -- when he was speaking, when he was in the synagogue -- the accepted norm was "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." That if they did it to you, you have a right to do it back.

And he gave us a completely different definition of love that, 2,000 years later, we're still not doing a very good job with. That we're still kind of wanting to just hold back. And his definition of love was huge. That you just love, love, love. And it gave us a model for possibilities.

The second thing he taught over and over again was: don't judge. And our head loves to judge! Right? Don't judge; don't judge; don't judge! But the moment we judge is the moment our heart closes. You can't be in a thought of judgement -- because judgement is a thought. You can't be in a thought of judgement with an open heart. You can't be open-hearted thinking, "*What a creep.*" **[Congregation laughs]** You just ... you can't do it. Right? You can't judge somebody. Like, "*What a loser.*" The moment you judge somebody, right? Your heart instantly closes. Because the act of judging them, you're actually trying to keep yourself safe. So your heart automatically closes.

So you can't be in a judgement and an open heart in the same moment. So you're going to kind of have to decide: Do I want to love? Or do I want to just judge everybody? And from the ego part of us -- from the human part of us -- we've got to be honest. Sometimes it's just fun to judge people! Like, "*Who taught them to put those clothes on?*" You know, "*Who taught that person how to drive?*" Or, "*Who taught you manners?*" Right?

Like, that human part of us wants to take everybody's inventory and just tell everybody, really -- if we were king or queen for the day -- how to live their life. And we think that that would be really fun. The problem is that it's just so isolating. That every time you judge someone, you isolate yourself. And it doesn't build bridges; it doesn't build connections. It just isolates us.

The first thing he taught was love. The second thing he taught was don't judge. And the third thing he taught was that, when you mess up on the first two -- and this is a paraphrase! When you mess up on the first two, you have to forgive. That forgiveness is the way that we restore relationship. Forgiveness is the way that we restore.

And so, over and over again, when you forget to love, when you move solidly into your judgements, forgive. Forgive yourself. Forgive them. Forgive everybody and move back into love. And over and over again, I think that's the basis of what he taught.

So tonight I want us to really look at your ... [Laughs] Your opinions of others. Okay? So I want you to look at what happens in you when you have opinions about others.

Now, when you have an opinion about somebody -- that they're fabulous or beautiful or wonderful or spiritual or brilliant or generous, When you have an opinion about somebody that is positive -- a positive opinion about somebody -- what happens to your heart? It opens! Right? So when you think somebody is great or fantastic or beautiful or loving or kind or generous -- when you have a high opinion of somebody -- your heart just naturally opens.

Now, let's look at the opposite of that. When you have a low opinion of someone, what happens to your heart? It closes! It contracts, right? It contracts!

Now, I want you to see that that's why every awful thing that has happened on this planet has happened. Because the moment we have a negative opinion about anyone, we feel justified in our worst

behavior. That every time we have believed that someone is unworthy, unlovable, unhuman, unacceptable ... The moment we move into a negative opinion about everyone/anyone, our heart closes. And then we feel justified in behaving any way we choose.

Tonight I want you to be willing to look at your opinion of others. Not just the good opinions -- the positive, uplifting opinions -- but the opinions that are ... And you may feel that those opinions are just as accurate. But I want you to look at the opinions of the people that you're not very pleased with. And the reason that I want to point this out is: your opinion is just your opinion. Right? It may matter; it may not matter. But it matters to you! Because the moment that you have an opinion about anyone -- and you have a negative opinion about anyone -- your heart begins to close and contract. And I want you to see the cost: that sometimes even the people we love! When we have an opinion about somebody -- even of somebody that we think we love! But the moment we have an opinion about them, our heart closes and contracts

And if we're going to really move into a year of love, I want you to really begin to be aware of all the opinions that are running your life, positive and negative. And what would begin to happen if you just suspended those opinions and just chose not to judge? If you could just be in a framework of not judging?

"Well, Richard, I don't know how to do that." I know! Most of us don't! Right?

Do you know the number one thing that defines whether or not a child is successful in school? [Congregants shout out] Grades? No; good guess, though. It's one adult who believes in them. Every child, to be successful in life and in school, needs one adult. And it really doesn't matter who that adult is. It could be a parent; it could be an aunt or an uncle. It could be a foster mom or a foster dad. It can be a teacher. It can be a grandparent. It can be a neighbor. It doesn't matter who it is. But every kid to succeed -- the results are just amazing! -- needs to believe that someone believes in them. Because the moment a child thinks that someone -- or can feel that someone -- believes in them, they begin to excel. Because even when they're in their times of self-doubt, they know somebody else has a bigger vision of them than they're living for themselves.

There was a study done. A team of researchers led by Robert Rosenstien went off to an elementary school and administered intelligence tests to all the students. The researchers told teachers in each classroom which students the data identified as being acadmic superstars: the ones with the greatest potential for growth. They asked the teachers not to mention the results of the study and not to spend any more or any less time with them. And, in fact, they were going to actually observe the teachers for the remainder of the school year to ensure that they didn't spend any more time with these students.

The students were then tested again at the end of the year. You know, the Sams the Sallys and Sarahs -- which were, you know, they just made up names for these kids. There were three students in every class. These three students tested off the charts in intelligence.

This would be predictable, except for the three students that they picked in each classroom had just average intelligence. Okay? So the experiment is: they test all the kids for intelligence. They come back and they tell the teachers, "These three students have extraordinary intelligence." The teacher then hears that from professionals, right? And believes that these kids have extraordinary intelligence. And the only thing that's supposed to have changed is the belief of the teacher toward these kids.

And by the end of the school year, these three kids who were all average -- wonderfully average in every way -- tested off the charts! Right? So what we believe about someone impacts that someone, even if it's never spoken!

So when you see the greatness of another, that impacts their life, even if it's never spoken! When you believe in someone, even if it's never spoken, it impacts the quality of their life! If you have a negative

opinion of someone, I want you to see -- at some level; at a spiritual level and an emotional level -- they're going to feel that. And it's one more thing that they have to overcome in their life. But the moment your opinion of them changes, their soul can feel that someone believes in them, and they respond to that.

Isn't that amazing? That words don't even have to be used for other people to feel your opinion? That all of us are either lifting people up, or we're tearing people down. That this is our opportunity.

I heard a minister, and this is another ... I heard a minister on TV share a story about a family in his congregation. That the oldest son was in high school having a really tough time. He went to his mom and dad and said, *"I want to drop out."*

And the mom said, *"But you're so smart! I know you're smart!"*

And he said, *"But I hate school; I want to drop out."*

And she goes, *"I'll make you a deal. If you take the SAT scores, and you don't score high on the SATs, I'll let you drop out."*

The kid took the SATs, scored a 1480, which is ... 1600 is a perfect test. So he scored a 1480. And the mom, as the story was told, the mom comes to the kid, *"Did you cheat?"*

And he goes, *"No! But I can't believe my score was that high!"* That he took the test -- a 1480.

And his mom goes, *"I knew you were smart! I've been telling you your whole life you're smart!"*

And he said, *"You know, I never believed you."*

So he finished high school, went to a community college. And he went on to a four-year college. Was in graduate school. Five years later, he gets a letter from the SAT Boards, as the story goes, and it says that they made a mistake with his test. **[Congregation laughs]** He actually only scored a 740. Like in the normal range, right?

So ... **[Laughs]** So here was this average kid who all of a sudden believed in himself, and he began to excel. He just began to excel, because somebody believed in him more than he believed in himself.

That, over and over again, what I want you to see is that, if we love someone ... Like, do you remember the first time you fell in love? Like, I want to take you all the way back, a hundred years ago. First time you fell in love. Right? Do you remember how "goo goo" you got? Like, *"Ohhhhhhhh."* Right? Like, *"Isn't he cute?"* Or, *"Isn't she wonderful?"* *"She's so pretty!"* *"He's so nice!"* Like, remember what it was?

The moment you really fall in love, you see the greatness in another! You see their greatness, right? Because you're in love! And everybody else around you is going, *"I don't get it!"* **[Congregation laughs]** *"That guy hasn't bathed in a month; I mean, I don't get it! What's the attraction?"* Right?

But when we're in love, we actually see the best! We see the greatness! We see the potential! We see the possibilities! And that's what I want you to see: that in our world today, love calls us to see the greatness in each other.

In 1960 MIT business professor Doug McGregor famously posted what managers described as one of two human motivation theories. One was the X Theory. And the X Theory holds that people work because they're paid, and if you don't watch them -- if you don't watch them! -- they won't work. Theory Y says the opposite: that people are intrinsically motivated, and that they work harder and better when you just leave them alone. And if you expect them to do satisfactory work, that they will rise to your expectations.

When researchers tried to study what would happen when X or Y workers were exposed to leaders of the opposing style, they ran into a snag. Few managers have employees of opposite theory! Managers

who believe in the X Theory turned out to have workers who were also X, while managers of the Y tended to have employees who loved their job and worked for the satisfaction of the work. It turns out that, no matter what the motivation was of the workers, the managers' mindset defined the experience.

Right? That's quantum physics! Quantum physics says, "*As you believe, it is done unto you!*" Right? That what you expect to see is what you're going to see!

And what I want you to see tonight: if we're going to move into this year of love, that we actually have to begin to see people differently. We have to!

Not only do I want you to see yourself differently, but I want you to see the people in your life differently! I want you to see their greatness! I want you to speak to their soul! I want you to be at night praying to their soul, that their soul steps into their greatness! That they are living a greater, fuller, happier, more prosperous life than they ever have before!

In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, it says this: "*Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up.*" Can I read it one more time? "*Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up.*"

[Laughs] It's in the Bible; you have to do it now! **[Congregation laughs]** Sorry; it's in the Book! Right? You have to do it!

Your job is to be lifting the people around you higher! Seeing them in their greatness! Seeing them expressing God! Seeing their spiritual nature! Seeing them overcome every hurdle! Seeing them living their best life! That's our job! That God put us all on this planet at the same time to build each other up. Because self-doubt is a part of our journey. And when we don't have people around us who believe in us, self-doubt can win. But when we have people around us who believe in us, we're called into a greater experience.

You know, one of the terms that the Bible uses often is this idea of honor. One of the Commandments was to honor our father and our mother. That this idea in the Bible was that we were supposed to honor the people around us. That we were supposed to honor who they are. And, in fact, in 1 Peter 2:17 it says, "*Honor everyone.*" Like, could that be any simpler? "*Honor everyone.*" Right?

Matthew 7:12 -- the Golden Rule -- says, "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This is the law of all the prophets.*"

Our work tonight: I want you to see that your vision of anyone has power. There are no "free lunches" in this one. If you see someone as "less than," you're actually supporting them in being less than. If you see someone's greatness, you're actually facilitating and calling it out in them.

We all need at least one person in our life who believes in us! That doesn't mean we're limited to one person. I want you to be believing in everybody in your life! I want you to be seeing the greatness in every person in your life, and lifting them higher than they think they can go on their own. Because that's how we do it! "*Where two or more are gathered, the presence of Christ is there! The fullness of God is there!*" That we're here today to really lift each other up.

So you know what your homework is? Not only do I want you to do all five ... **[Laughs]** Don't add conflict. Open your heart. Pick a person of love. Add more love to the world. And heal yourself in the process. And six is: your job is to see the greatness in everyone. Honor everyone.

We can no longer afford to continue to bad-talk, bad-vision each other. We can't do it! I don't care if you agree with them. I don't even care if you like them! I want you to see the people in your life -- the people in your community, the people in this church, the people in the parking lot of the mall. I want you to see them in their greatness. Because if we're going to heal the world, we have work to do. And it would be great if somebody else could do it for us, but we need to be perfected in love. And the way that we get perfected in love is to see the greatness in every person.

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. Holy Spirit, help me. Help me see with new eyes. Help me look beyond the limitations. Help me look beyond my judgements, my opinions. Help me to lift everybody up. Help me to see every child of God as created in your image and in your likeness, with your perfection within them. That everyone is created in your image and in your likeness. Tonight I want to see it. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is.

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