

MASTERING LOVE

Week #7 of the Ongoing Series, "A Year of Love"

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Have you ever felt like you've mastered something in your life? We just saw the Olympics, and Nathan Chen: we just watched him get a gold medal. And, you know, when you see someone who's mastered something, it is ... It is something to behold! Right? And I think about how many hours and how much work he spent to just hone his craft. And how, at the last Olympics, he fell. And he was expected to place, and he just was out. And there he was: gold medal. Such a great story! Right?

Such a great story about, not only just mastering your craft, but mastering yourself. And just reading the articles about afterwards, what it took for him to get back in the game, and to stay in the game. And how he was in the bus going from the Olympic Village and the venue, and just marveling at all the things that were going on around him. And just fully in the moment before he walked in there; that he didn't let his nerves get away from him. That he just really mastered, not only himself, but his craft and what he does.

And there's something about somebody who masters what they do. It's ... It looks effortless! You know, if I was trying to do -- what did he do? Fix, six, whatever triple jumps? Quadruple whatever? Triple salchow with a thing? And, I mean, there would be body parts flying all over the ice if I was trying that, right? [Congregation laughs] I'd be, like, flat out on the ice, sliding across it! It just would be ugly! Right?

But somebody who's mastered what they do: it's an incredible thing. You know, even watching the tradesmen that have worked in our house. We had a guy replace the ... fix our block wall. And this guy was such a master at being a mason -- at fixing this block wall. He didn't waste one move. Those bricks, man; they went pow, pow, pow, pow! Right? And there was no ... He didn't waste any cement or mortar. He didn't waste any bricks. He didn't waste any energy. And it would have been a three-day job for me, and everything would have been out of skew. Right? [Congregation laughs] It would have been terrible!

And when you master something ... There's something mastering what you do. Tonight I want to talk about mastering love. Because it's the one thing that I think that applies to all of us. Not all of us are going to be a master chef or a master athlete or a master mason, but I think that there's a spiritual invitation for all of us to master love.

And I think that some of us have thought a reluctance to really take on mastering love as a job. Right? Because there is a culture of belief, at some level, that if we go too far into love, it will just make us stupid. Right? That if we go all the way into love, we'll make bad choices; we'll let our guard down; we'll let people hurt us. We'll just make bad choices!

How many of you ever felt that love made you stupid? Like in your 20s, your 30s, your 70s, your 80s, your 90s? [Congregation laughs] Right? That love just sometimes -- it feels like it makes us stupid. That we don't make good choices. Like, we don't rule from our head; we don't think about it. We just ... [Congregation laughs] You know, we go into that "lovey-dovey" zone, and we're not really making good choices.

And tonight, I want to really focus on: what does it mean to you to master love? Because, over and over again, I have this belief that it just means that we open our hearts all the way and just leave it open. That we just decide that we're going to lead with love. We're just going to open our hearts all the way and just lead with love. And that love will guide us and direct us and heal us and prosper us.

And most of us have thought, "No!" You know, our ego tells us, "No! We can't do that! Because we'll get hurt!"

How many of you have ever been hurt by love? Has everybody had that experience? I really hope you have, right? I want everybody to have been hurt at least once really good in love! Because once you've been hurt really good in love, then you realize it's a choice. Like, I can choose to live with my heart closed, and you can feel what that feels like. Or you can choose to live with your heart open, and feel what that feels like. And they're not the same!

How many of you have ever held on to pain for more than, like, 10 minutes? [Congregation laughs] Right? Twenty? How about a year? Anybody held on to pain for a year? [Congregation laughs] How about 10 years? Right?

And what I want you to see is: what happens is we have an experience where it feels like our heart breaks or our heart's been stomped on, or whatever it is. And then what most of us do is: after the pain is sufficiently ... you know, our heart's broken. Then we close the door to our hearts. And our heart now is safely locked into the pain. And we think, "Well, I'm protecting my heart." Well, no; you're not. Now you're really just punishing your heart so you never have to open it again.

And if we're really going to master love, I believe that we just have to open it and keep it open. Because the thing that, as I read the ministry of Jesus; as I read his teachings; as I read what he was inviting people into ... He invited people into this vulnerable place where they had to go the extra mile with an open heart and learn that love was actually greater than anything that life could throw at them.

Like, when Jesus said, *"If a man asks for your shirt, you give him your coat, too."* Like, come on! How about a shirt I don't wear? [Congregation laughs] And, better yet, how about a shirt that doesn't fit any more? Can I give him one of those? Right?

And so he kept asking us to go the extra mile, because he wanted us to see if -- in our most vulnerable place -- if we could open our heart there, could we actually feel safe? Or if somebody asks you to walk a mile, not only walk the mile for them, but walk two miles!

And one of my favorite things that he did was: there was a time when Jesus sent out his disciples -- his 12. And then there was a time when he sent out a hundred of his followers -- out into the world, into the countryside, to do the work that he was doing. And he sent them out two by two, so there would always be somebody for them to hold on to; so there would always be somebody that would just walk with them. And what I love about it is: he didn't give them an expense account. [Congregation laughs] There was no gold American Express card. He didn't give them an RV. He didn't give them diddly! He didn't give them anything. He said, *"Go out there and do the works that I'm going to do"* -- and he wanted them to be completely vulnerable. *"And see if you do these good works -- if you do it in a sense of profound love -- will you be taken care of? Will you be blessed?"*

And, over and over again, he watched as they made it. They lived. They did the works that he was doing. They were ministering! And that, in our life, we tend to want to be safe. And yet, love calls us to go the extra mile.

So what's the opposite of love? How many of you want to vote for fear as the opposite of love? Anybody want to take that one? How many want to vote for hatred as the opposite of love? Anybody want to vote for that one? I'm going to vote for the opposite of love is safety. [Congregation murmurs] And that our ego wants us to be safe.

And every time our ego feels that we're in any danger, the message our mind sends to us is: *"Close your heart so that you can get through this with a closed heart."* And it's an incredible moment when you just decide, *"No; I'm going to open my heart, and I'm just going to leave it open. And I'm going to master this thing. I'm going to see if the love of God that's in me -- that I offer to the world, that I offer to myself -- is*

really enough to go through whatever event life calls me to go through. If I can just open my heart all the way, and just be a channel through whatever vulnerabilities -- through whatever's going on -- if I can just be a channel for love."

And I especially want you to look at the places in your life where you feel the most stuck. Like, in relationship, in your work, in your finances, in your health ... I want you to see in the places where you feel the most stuck: is your heart really open in that spot? Because my belief is -- my experience with working with a whole lot of people -- is the place where you notice you're stuck is the place where your heart is probably the most closed. Because if your heart's not open, life tends to stop until you can open there.

How many of you heard the idea that it tends to persist as long as you resist? Right? And so what I want you to see tonight is that sometimes life keeps circling back around -- or spiraling back around -- until you learn to open your heart right there. And that keeps coming back at you over and over and over again, just asking you the question: *"Can you keep your heart open in that moment? In that experience? In that situation?"* And life loves you so much [laughs] that we get mulligans. Right? That it keeps coming back around over and over and over again until we can just open our heart and just let our heart be open right there. That we can move forward.

How many of you remember Robert Fulghum. The "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" or "It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It," or whatever that book was. That one of his favorite stories is entitled, "Giants, Wizards and Dwarfs." And I'm going to share it with you tonight.

"Giants, wizards and dwarfs was the game to play. Being left in charge of about 80 children seven to 10 years old, while their parents were off doing parenty things, I mustered my troops in the church social hall and explained the game.

It's a large-scale version of Rock, Paper, and Scissors, and involves some intellectual decision making. But the real purpose of the game is to make a lot of noise and run around chasing people until nobody knows which side you are on or who won.

Organizing a roomful of wired-up grade schoolers into two teams, explaining the rudiments of the game, achieving consensus on group identity -- all this is no mean accomplishment, but we did it with a right good will and were ready to go.

The excitement of the chase had reached a critical mass. I yelled out: 'You have to decide now which you are--a GIANT, a WIZARD, or a DWARF!'

While the groups huddled in frenzied, whispered consultation, a tug came at my pants leg. A small child stands there looking up, and asks in a small, concerned voice, 'Where do the Mermaids stand?'"

[Congregation laughs]

"Where do the Mermaids stand? A long pause. A very long pause. 'Where do the Mermaids stand?' says I.

'Yes. You see, I am a Mermaid.'

'There are no such thing as Mermaids.'

'Oh, yes, I am one!'

She did not relate to being a Giant, a Wizard, or a Dwarf. She knew her category. Mermaid. And was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where a loser would stand. She intended to participate, wherever Mermaids fit into the scheme of things. Without giving up dignity or identity. She took it for granted that there was a place for Mermaids and that I would know just where.

Well, where DO the Mermaids stand? All the 'Mermaids'—all those who are different, who do not fit the norm and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes?

Answer that question and you can build a school, a nation, or a world on it.

What was my answer at the moment? Every once in a while, I say the right thing. 'Mermaids stands right here by the King of the Sea!' says I. (Yes, right here by the King's Fool, I thought to myself.)

So we stood there hand in hand, reviewing the troops of Wizards and Giants and Dwarfs as they roiled by in wild disarray.

It is not true, by the way, that Mermaids do not exist. I know at least one personally. I have held her hand."

So today I want us to look at some things that are signs that we're not quite as full as we think we are. Some signs that maybe your heart isn't as open as you'd like it to be. Some signs that maybe we need to kind of take a step back in our life and really make sure that we're doing the inner work and the outer work to really be filled up. And I'm going to be using Greg Baer's book, *Real Love*, as the framework for this -- on five things that consistently don't work if we want to master love.

And the first one is **LYING**. Now, we all know that lying means not telling the truth. And yet, his definition of lying is much more expanded than that. His definition of lying is when you're doing things that aren't authentic to you to receive someone else's support, approval, acknowledgement ... so that they like you, so they love you.

So, by his definition, if you're dating and you wash your car, and then went you get in the relationship you never wash the car again, the washing of your car would be a lie. Right? Because it's not authentically who you are, and you're actually doing things that generate a level of acknowledgement. But it's not honest; it's not really who you are. It's not really being accurate with who you are.

Because our ego tells us over and over again we're just clearly not enough. Like, over and over and over again, for most of us there's this voice that says, "*You really need to do more.*"

And that's why sometimes we go to restaurants that we can't really afford. Because we love it when people think that we're all that and a bag of nuts. Or we want to be generous at holidays or Christmas time, or slapping down that Visa card. And we know that we're at the limit! Right? But we want to appear that we're more successful or we're more this or that.

And the whole thing that, you know, we're so conditioned to exaggerate ourselves, because we don't really believe that who we are is really enough. That anyone would like us if we really knew who we are underneath all the trappings; underneath all the camouflage; underneath all the stuff that we're doing.

That, over and over again, what would happen if people just got to see the real you? Do you think anyone would love you? And could you love the real you? Could you open your heart to the real person?

Now, you know, I was listening to an interview a couple of days ago. And about 10 minutes into the interview, the person being interviewed said, "*Now I'm going to tell you the truth.*" I'm thinking, "*Well, what was the last 10 minutes?*" [Congregation laughs] Right? You know? And we're so conditioned in our culture to, like, kind of blow the smoke -- to fluff it up -- that it really kind of takes away from it.

Now, telling the truth isn't about, "*I'm going to tell the truth about what I think about you.*" Have you ever had a friend say, "*Well, I'm going to tell you the truth. This is what I really think about you.*" It's like, I don't want to know! [Congregation laughs] Like, I don't really need you to take my inventory! Now, if you want to share the truth about you -- about what you're going through; about what you're feeling; about what your needs are; what frightens you; who you are underneath the facade -- I've got all the

time in the world for that! But telling me all the things you think I could do better ... you know, not so much.

So the first one I want us to look at as we're mastering love is: notice the places in your life where you're still not telling the whole truth. Where you're not really revealing yourself. Where you're not being as authentic as you could be.

And the second one is: is there anywhere in your life where you're **ATTACKING**? Or defending yourself? And attacking just isn't like a physical attack; it's not even just the words that we use. Right? That attack, again, is a very broad sense of ... Are there any eye-rollers? [Congregation laughs] You know what an eye-roll is? It's when somebody says something really stupid, and you just go, "*Oh, my gosh.*" [Rolls his eyes dramatically] [Congregation laughs] Right?

Now, technically, that's an attack, because you want the person to know that you know how stupid they are. Right? You can't just let it roll; you have to roll your eyes so you make a comment so they know that you know that what they said was not ...

Do we have any "cluckers" in the room? You know what a cluck is? "*Oooohhhhh.*" It usually goes with the eye-roll. It's kind of a two-part attack. If they don't see the eye-roll, you know they're going to see the cluck. Right? And what I want you to see is that, over and over again, you're not communicating love and acceptance. You're communicating judgement.

And then the third one that I think we need to bring into the conversation is that intellectual sarcasm. So that you're actually letting the person know that you know how dumb they are. Right? And that, when we're sarcastic enough, it kind of clears the field so that your ego gets to feel supreme. Right?

So if it's lying ... If it's attacking ...

And the third one ... I'm going to get there. My page is stuck. Would you love me if you knew that my page is stuck together? [Congregation titters]

The third one is **ACTING LIKE A VICTIM**. And it's when we're feeling so empty that we want everybody to know what a victim we are to life.

And the fourth one is when we cling. Right? **CLINGING** to that person. Like when -- I talked about it last week -- when you pick up the phone and you know who they are. And you're trying to hold the phone out here so they don't suck the life force right out of you? Because they're just trying to cling; they're trying to suck all the energy and the love.

And the fifth one is **RUNNING**. And running is when we abandon or run away from a moment, a situation or a purpose because we're afraid that they're not going to love us the way we want to.

Has anyone seen the new movie, *Marry Me*? [Some congregants respond] Did you like it? Okay; don't give it away! I love this movie! J-Lo and -- what's his name? Owen Wilson? Adorable! Now, you know, I don't know what service it's on; we watched it. I don't know.

But one of the characters in the movie -- without giving it away! In the middle of the movie, the relationship's going so great! In the middle of the movie, this character actually ends the relationship ... Oh, and now I spoiled it! [Claps hands over his mouth; congregation laughs] It works out. But I don't give too much away, okay? I think I already have ... Right? But the character runs away, right? And you're thinking, "*No! Don't run away! It's beautiful! We're all enjoying it! We're all watching it; we're all experiencing love!*" And this character runs away!

Over and over again, what I want you to see is: what if I guarantee -- GUARANTEE! -- that if you stayed in love, whatever's going on in your life; whatever the need; the healing; finances; your work; family ...

whatever it is! If you stay in love -- if you trust love; if you open your heart all the way; if you move into a master's level of love -- that love truly will see you through.

And I guarantee there's going to be moments that hurt. There'll be moments where your head tells you to shut down your heart and run away. And if you stay in love -- if you really stay in love -- it gets better. That you truly learn that love is more powerful than any of your fears.

And the people that trust love at that level -- they're transformative. People in your life that just love you no matter what heal us at depth.

See this is something we can all do! You may never be a world-class figure skater or a chef or a NASCAR racecar driver or Jacques Cousteau or Aaron Rodgers. You may never be any of those things! But what I promise you that we can all do is master love. And that, literally, as you trust love -- as you open your heart all the way to yourself and to everyone else -- you're going to touch and bless literally hundreds and hundreds of people that will feel different because of your love.

And it's not easy. Your ego will tell you it is stupid. That you should run away. You should shut it down. You should not do it. And yet, in opening your heart all the way, magic happens.

So are you ready for your homework? So your homework this week is: I want you to open your heart and just leave it open. I don't want it to be controlled any more by what you think or what you believe or what you sense. I want you just to decide that you're going to be a spiritual radical, and that you're just going to open your heart all the way and leave it open and just see what happens. That you're going to love yourself and everyone around you, and just be a pure channel for love. And to see if everything in your life doesn't get better. Doesn't move up to a higher form. Isn't transformed right before your very eyes.

"I trust love." Will you say that with me?

[With congregation:] *"I trust love."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"I trust love."*

Let's take it into prayer:

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. That today we just love. We just love! Not because it's easy; not even because sometimes we want to. Because sometimes we don't! But we love because it's our nature. We were created out of the love of God. And it's the only thing that truly feels right. And when we love, we come home. We come back to ourselves; we come back to God! We connect; at a very profound level, we connect with the people around us.

Today, just love. Just open your heart and keep it open. And see the power of love at work in your life. And so it is. Amen.

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