

# LOVE OPENS THE DOOR

Week #8 of the Ongoing Series, "A Year of Love"

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Okay; so tonight I'm going to start off, and I'm going to go way out to the far end of the limb and, God willing, I'm going to get back to the tree. [Congregation laughs]

So if, at any point, you go, "*He's really kind of off on a tangent,*" I want you to know that I actually know that when I do it. [Congregation laughs] Now, I don't always get back to the tree, but my intent is to do that. So that's where I'm going. Okay; so, you ready? Here we go!

Do you have a favorite company slogan? Do you know what a company slogan is? You know, like "*Coke and a smile,*" or whatever. A company slogan is a business slogan; it's a catchphrase. It's a small sentence or group of words that are combined to identify a product or a company. In many ways, it's a mini mission statement. It's supposed to be humorous. You know, it's a slogan; it's like a logo, only it's words.

See, I have an undergraduate degree in marketing, and how I got into ministry was an interesting thing. Right? But one of the things that I've always loved is a great slogan. You know, great slogans are funny. You know, there's four aspects: they're memorable; they describe or include a key benefit of the product or the company; they differentiate your brand from other companies or other brands; and they impart a positive feeling. Like, nobody would remember a slogan that depressed you! [Congregation laughs] Right? Like, they've got to be kind of cute or funny.

And so we're going to play a game tonight. And I'm going to share with you a slogan, and you're going to shout out if you know the name of the company whose slogan it is. Alright? So we're going to play a little game and see how well we do. There's no prizes, but we're going to play.

"*There are some things that money can't buy, but for everything else there's ...*" [Congregants shout out answers] MasterCard! You knew it! You were just being cute.

Alright, let's try number two; now, if you don't get this one right, I'm going to stop the talk right now.

"*Melts in your mouth, not in your hands.*" [Congregants shout out answer] M&M's!

"*Diamonds are forever.*" You know whose slogan that is? [Congregants shout out answer] DeBeer and Company.

"*Tastes so good, cats ask for it by name.*" [Congregants shout out answer] Meow Mix!

"*Just do it!*" [Congregants shout out answer]

Now this one is going to be a harder one!

"*Because you're worth it!*" Do you know what company that is? [Congregants shout out answer] Loreal! Oh, my gosh!

Now this one -- if you don't know this one, you have not been around television or radio in the last 40 years. Right?

"*Got milk?*" [Congregants shout out answer] Milk! The California Milk Advisory Board. That's it!

Okay, "*The quicker picker-upper.*" [Congregants shout out answer] Bounty! One person yelled, "*Swiffer,*" but no; it's Bounty.

"*Bet you can't eat just one.*" [Congregants shout out answer] Lay's potato chips.

"*All the news that's fit to print.*" [Congregants shout out answer] New York Times! Very good!

And I think our favorite: "*Where's the beef?*" Remember that one? [Congregants shout out answer] Wendy's! Wendy's is "*Where's the beef?*"

See, I want you to [laughs] have ... I want you to have a slogan! I want you to have a personal little mission statement that is running and driving your life. With all that's going on in the world, I want you to have that mission statement -- that little slogan -- that you come back to over and over and over again.

When I was a young minister, I heard a minister talking about how much their purpose -- their slogan; their statement -- how much it kept him on track. He was talking to a group of ministers and he said, *"You know, there's times in ministry where I guarantee you're going to be discouraged, where you're going to be disappointed, where you're going to think it doesn't matter; that nobody's paying attention and it doesn't count."* He said, *"I want you to have a statement -- an idea -- that you come back to over and over again that clarifies why you're doing what you do."*

At that time, I came up with a statement: To teach the greatest truth I know in the greatest possible way.

And I remember my first class -- the first time I ever taught a class. There were four people. And I prayed that nobody would drop the class. [Congregation laughs] It was a six-week class, and I was convinced that, by the sixth week, it was just going to be in that cold church basement. Right?

And now I think about how many places God has given me to speak and to teach. I had the opportunity to speak at the UN; to meet some of the great spiritual teachers of our time. But the things that make the difference to me is all the ways that God has used my teaching in ways that I could never have imagined.

There was one time, years ago, where a lady came up to me and said, *"I shared your talk from last Sunday, and I sent it to my brother, who's on the City Council in a city in Ohio."* And there was some big thing going on in their city, and he listened to the talk, and he loved it so much that he called and the entire City Council met a half-an-hour before the meeting to listen to my talk. And I thought, *"How in a talk in Phoenix, Arizona, is God going to get it in front of a group of people in Ohio at their time of need in that little community?"* God is amazing!

And there's something that's powerful when we really remember why we're here and what we're about. Because sometimes we get discouraged.

You know, one of my favorite corporate slogans is "Love All, Serve All." Do you know what company that is? Hard Rock Cafe. Hard Rock Cafe: their casinos, their restaurants, their cafes, their hotels -- everything they do -- prominently print that. I remember the first time I walked into a Hard Rock; it was like 12-inch letters on the back wall that said, "Love All, Serve All." And I thought, *"Man! Is that cool, or what?"* Around the world they've had one theme -- one idea: Love All, Serve All.

And in this year of love -- where we've dedicat4ed this year to love -- there is this reminder, over and over again, that love calls us to serve.

And it's not always easy to serve. I mean, sometimes [laughs] people are rascals. [Congregation laughs] That's about as clean as I can get it. Right? People are a piece of work, right? And sometimes you just don't want to serve them. You just don't want to do it; you don't want to go the extra mile and do all the things that Jesus invited us to do. We just want to stop.

But then you hear things like in 1st James -- in James 1 -- it says this:

*"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if you are a hearer of the word, not a doer, you are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and then go away and immediately forget what they look like."*

And I love that imagery! Because it's a complex spiritual idea. Because that's really all we're ever doing. We look at ourselves as spiritual beings; we look at ourselves as created in the image and likeness of

God. And can we hold that perfect image that God has for us? Can we see ourselves in that light, or do we see ourselves as broken or less than? Do we see ourselves as wounded or, in some way, inferior?'

And this Scripture says, No! That those that are more than just hearers of the word -- they're actually doers of the word -- actually remember who they are.

And then it goes on and says:

*"But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act -- they will be blessed in their doing."*

And that's what I want for all of us! I want whatever you are called to do in the world; I want you to be blessed by it! I want it to come back and bless you in just amazing and incredible ways. I want you to feel that God's grace and ease is placed upon you, and the good is coming back to you over and over again.

And the key, for me, is that we open our heart, and we serve more. I want us all to love more and serve more.

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"Love more, serve more. Love more, serve more. Love more, serve more."*

There's a story that my family tells about my grandmother. And it's where I came up with the title for today's talk, "Love Opens the Door." And my grandmother ... Rogers tend to be built kind of like me; we're above-average size-wise, if you look at a normal person. Right? My grandmother was 97 pounds. How we all got like this from a 97-pound woman, I'm not completely sure. But she, on a good day, was 97 pounds. Right?

And there's a story that she would tell about Fashion Island in Newport Beach. Have any of you been shopping in Fashion Island in Newport Beach? It's a big mall right there just in Newport. And at the time that the story she tells took place, she was walking into a May Company. Now, they don't even have May Company anymore! May Companies became Robinson's, and Robinson's became Macy's.

And she was walking into May Company, and my grandfather dropped her off at the parking lot in the driveway. And there were many steps leading up to the store, and then there would be a flat area, and then you'd open the door and you'd go in. And it was all glass at the front of the store.

So she's going up the steps and, as she's looking at the store, she sees an elderly woman who's coming out of the store. And she begins to hurry to go open the door for this woman. And she notices that this woman, as she's hurrying to open the door for her, the woman on the inside is hurrying to the door to open it for her. And the more she hurries, the more the woman on the inside hurries. And when she gets to the door and opens it, she realizes that it's not glass at all, but it's a mirror! And she saw that elderly woman, and she didn't realize it was her! [Congregation laughs]

She could not believe how old she had gotten; that she could not believe that she was going to help that elderly woman with the door, and it was her!

And that, over and over again, what I want you to see is that we are called to serve in a greater way. And that love really does open the door! Love opens the door!

And our human side -- our ego -- says, *"You know, maybe not today. You know, I've done my share. I don't really have to do more."* Or are you a part of us that says, when we do go that extra step and do a little more, that human part of us just gets a little resentful, and thinks it really doesn't matter?

Reading from Luke 10, 23 to 27:

*"Just then a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And he said, 'What is written in the law? How do you read it?' And he answered him,*

*'That you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' And then Jesus said to him, 'You have answered rightly. Now go and live it likewise.'*"

*But the lawyer was a little "sneaky," and wanted to further test Jesus, So the lawyer said ...*

*"So he desired to test Jesus, and asked him, 'But who do I say is my neighbor.' And Jesus answered him, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem from Jericho, and he fell upon some robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was coming along the road; and when he saw him, he passed to the other side. And likewise a Levi, for he had come to the place and saw him, and passed over to the other side. But a Samaritan as he journeyed along came to him and saw him, and had compassion upon him. And he went to him and bound up his wounds, and he poured oil and wine upon them. And he set him upon his beast, and he brought him to an inn, and he took care of him. And the next day he took two denarii and gave it to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of this man; and whatever else he needs I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three,' Jesus then says, 'proved who the neighbor was to this man who was robbed?' And the lawyer said, 'The one that showed him mercy.' And Jesus said, 'Go and do likewise.'"*

Okay? Now, let me give you context for this because, in our culture, it's not what it was 2,000 years ago. So the priest class -- the rabbis -- they were ... You can imagine they were seen as the spiritual elites, right? These were the people that were seen as, you know ... they were supposed to be the best. They were supposed to be kindest, the most spiritual. And so, in the story that Jesus tells, the priest goes to the other side and walks on by.

Now the next group that Jesus illustrates is the tribe of Levi. Now, the tribe of Levi -- in context -- they were the tribe that was responsible for taking care of the priestly class. They were responsible for taking care of the rabbis, and making sure that they were serving them. So they were seen as ... Of all the tribes of Israel, they were seen as the most spiritual tribe. They were the ones that were supposed to be doing the right thing. And, again, in Jesus' story, he walked to the other side.

And it was the Samaritan who was considered, in Jesus' time, kind of "low class." Kind of "less than." Right? Even though now, in today's world, when we think of a "good Samaritan" -- we've got a hospital here in town named Good Sam, Good Samaritan ... Now the term "good Samaritan" is a term of respect. It's a term of honor to be called the good Samaritan. It's a good thing; it's a badge. You know, it's great!

But in Jesus' time, to be a Samaritan was: you were not "it." Like, you were the bottom rung. And Jesus uses this story to illustrate the call that we all have to love all, serve all. Right? He didn't ... See, Jesus wasn't a tribalist; he was a universalist. He believed that all people were created in the image and likeness of God. He taught like Gandhi taught; he taught that there was no class system. That we should treat each other with a high degree of love and respect, no matter who we are.

In the world today, it's an invitation for all of us to kind of go back to that understanding that we're all created in the image and likeness of God. That we're all in this together. That there is one human family, and we're all members of it. And it's all of our thing.

And over and over again, Jesus called us to serve in a greater way. But he called us to do it in love.

Have you ever tried to serve somebody, and your heart really wasn't in it? How'd that go? What was it? Was it a really powerful experience for you? And was it a powerful experience for them? Or were you a little snarky about it?

"Snarky" is a spiritual term; it's found in the Old Testament. [Congregation laughs] *"And Moses said they got snarky with him."* And he ... Right?

And sometimes we get snarky! Because we think we've done our share, and we shouldn't have to do it. But love opens the door.

So several weeks ago, I'm in my driveway; I'm pulling out. I'm in the car. I'm dressed up; I'm going to a funeral. And the lady across the street's trimming her bushes. Now, I talk about my neighbor; I love my neighbor! I have great neighbors! A little neighborhood; cute little neighborhood; great little neighborhood.

And you know that I think I'm probably one of the funniest people you've ever met, right? [Congregation laughs] And I know that my sense of humor is an acquired taste; that it doesn't really ... Most people just don't think [laughs] I'm funny in the beginning. And, over time, I kind of just wear them down. Right?

So I roll out in my car -- I roll out into the street -- and my neighbor across the street, Lori; she has got the best-looking bushes and shrubs. She is the Edward Scissorhands of our neighborhood. [Congregation laughs] Did you see that movie? Do you remember that movie? Where he had all these, just, immaculate bushes? And they were all animals and all that stuff? She is the Edward Scissorhands of our neighborhood, and she's amazing.

And me being my funny self, roll down the window as she's trimming her bushes, and I say, "*Lori, when you're finished there, just go across the street, 'cause that guy over there is not doing a very good job*" -- meaning me. "*Not doing a very good job, so why don't you just kind of take care of that?*" And I think I'm funny! "*Ha ha ha!*" And I drive out giggling to myself about what a funny human being I am. And no one else would think that was funny. But, you know; it's my little head. That's how it rolls.

So I come back and my bushes are the proudest they've ever been. [Congregation laughs] I mean, they are standing straight and tall; she must have gotten a ruler or a level, because they were just [salutes], "*Thank you, sir!*" My bushes were so proud of themselves! My grass was even standing up straight, because my bushes were so ... I mean, it looked amazing!

So I go across the street to Lori, and I said, "*Lori, I was kidding! Thank you so much! My yard has never looked this good! Thank you so much! It is just ...*"

And she said, "*Richard, I knew you were going to a funeral, and I'm sure the family appreciated it. But I wanted to do something to make your day just a little bit better.*"

And it was like, "*How sweet is that?*" Right? And it was like, "*Thank you, Lori; I really received it. You've moved the bar up to a whole other level on my yard. And I will just ... I know you have to look at my bushes every day when you come out of your house; I will recommit to doing a better job.*"

So on Saturday, just a few days ago, I hear Edward Scissorhands back doing her bushes again. Right? she's out trimming her bushes. And I'm like, "*Oh, I'm getting out of bed, because she's not doing my yard two months in a row.*" Right? "*I've got to show up!*"

And so I get out there, and we're talking and teasing each other, and going back and forth. And I'm trimming my bushes, and I'm trying to keep them straight and, like, just perfect. And there's not a little ... right? And we're going back and forth.

And she says, "*Richard, I have an appointment, so I'm going to have to leave this mess. But I'll come back and, you know, if you see the 'Garden Police' of our neighborhood, just let them know that I'll be back.*"

So I said, "*I'm sure your house, of all houses, is the one that no one is going to complain about.*"

And so a few minutes later, half an hour later, I see her car drive down the street. And I run out there with my big can, right? And I'm raking up there; I'm sweeping everything. I'm getting her house ... It looked good! Like, it really looked good, right? And I've got to tell you, I felt fantastic! I mean, I just felt fantastic!

Because, in our neighborhood, we really do care about each other. Like, there's a high degree of love that we have in our neighborhood for each other. We watch out for each other; we take care of each other. We have parties together. It feels good to live in our neighborhood. It feels like you're part of a real community, not just a neighborhood. And it feels fantastic!

And so what I want us to focus on tonight -- where I want us to go with this, and what's the point of this, right? Is: I believe that, from the human point of view, when we get to the edge of going as far as we can go, there's one of two things that happens. When we get to the edge, and when we've gone as far as the human part of us can go, if we try to go one more step over the line ... You know that place where I'm talking about? Where you've given all that you feel like you can give to the individual or the situation? You've given everything you have?

And then if you try to go one more step over, usually what happens is that you get resentful. And you don't have to raise your hand, but I think all of us have experienced that thing when you've given to somebody, and you feel like you've given more than you should have. Or you've given in greater ways than you think is appropriate. And you just start noticing how resentful you get in that moment. Or the other thing that happens is that we just stop. We get to the edge; if we go further, we get resentful. If we stop, then we just stop, and we don't really have a breakthrough.

And Jesus' commandment is that we go the extra mile. We give the extra thing. We go the thing. And the thing that allows us to do that is that we have to love more. That, when you get to the edge of all that you have, and you feel deep inside yourself that God is calling you to take another step, that if you take that step from your humanity, you're often resentful. But if you open your heart, and really love more, as you give more, it opens a whole 'nother level of blessings to you.

And over and over again, I believe that, as a world, we have to step up our game. We have to go the extra mile, especially now. That we really have to love more and serve more for this to work out. We're at a critical point. And we're either going to move forward, or we're going to fall back. And the way that we move forward is that we love more and we serve more.

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"Love more, serve more."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"Love more, serve more."*

And I guarantee if you're serving in a way that is making you angry or resentful, your heart is closed. Your human self is doing it; your ego is doing it; your personality is doing it, but your spirit's not doing it. Your heart's not in it. And if we're going to serve more -- if we're going to move the planet forward -- our heart has to be in it! We have to love more!

And I guarantee there's somebody in your life that you do not want to love more or serve more. I do! I believe that that's for all of us; that each one of us has somebody in our life that we are called to love more and serve more. And, as we take this next step -- as we love more and serve more -- I guarantee doors will open in your life.

Will you pray with me? I want you to take a deep breath, and I want you to see if you can just open your heart. Holy Spirit, help me love more. Help me love more! Even when I don't want to; even when I'm resentful; even when I've given all that I have to give, help me love more. Before I do one more thing -- before I make one more action, take one more step, do one more nice thing -- help me love more. And let me feel the power of love in my life so that everything I do is a gift of love. Is an action from love. Is love in action. Open my heart, Spirit, in all the places where I've closed it. To all the people that I've closed it to. Open my heart so that I may remember who I am, and truly come back to myself. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.