

Loving Like Jesus

#4 – Being Self-Giving

In this current sermon series in Learning to Love Like Jesus, last week we looked at the third aspect and that was being grace-full people, i.e. people filled with God's grace and giving God's grace to others. Quickly as a reminder: there are two aspects of God's grace.

1. **Salvation grace:** we are saved by grace – it's a gift from God to people who don't deserve it (because of our many sins) and we can't earn it through our good works.
2. **Empowering grace:** it's the indwelling presence of God that empowers us to become more Jesus in our thoughts, our feelings and eventually in our actions.

Today's action point is really an extension of last Sunday's sermon. This morning I want to talk more about what it looks like to be grace-filled and grace-giving people. What does that look like practically. I'm calling today's action point being a "**self-giving**" person rather than "**self-ish**" person. A selfish person goes through life focused mainly on themselves and how they can maneuver their various life situations to benefit themselves. A self-giving person approaches life looking for how they can use what God has given them to benefit others.

And we really need to encourage more self-giving people in today's society. A few years ago, the New York Time published the results of survey they took. The article was entitled, "I'm OK, You're Selfish". And amid the results they discovered that only 17% of respondents admitted that they considered themselves to be selfish – but 60% responded that most other people are selfish most of the time.

This morning I want to look at loving like Jesus through self-giving in four ways.

1. Self-giving in the Old Testament
2. Self-giving in the New Testament
3. Self-giving in the early church
4. Self-giving in our lives

1. Self-Giving in the Old Testament

Proverbs 19:17 equates caring for the poor as a way of lending to the Lord.

In **Isaiah 58** God addresses the proper way to fast before the Lord. The Israelites had made fasting a big deal, whereas it involved not eating food for a day, offering up sacrifices to God and putting the mark of ashes on their bodies. But they were complaining to God that they'd been faithful to God but God didn't seem to be noticing and blessing them as a result. God responds rather harshly and says this isn't the kind of fasting that pleases me. Because how they defined fasting was really all about them doing something in order to get God to bless them. God responds with:

Isaiah 58:6-12 (NIV) *"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called **Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.***

God is declaring that fasting is not just about depriving yourself of food for a period of time. It's about using your time, energy and money to make a profound difference in the society in which you live. To reach out to those who are oppressed and burdened by various yokes and shackles and set them free. To be the light of God in the darkness in which they find themselves.

2. Self-giving in the New Testament:

When Jesus taught his disciples how to properly pray he instructed them to pray: "*Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Living out Isaiah 58 is being a part of God's kingdom coming in all of it's fullness to our planet right now. God wants us to be a part of being used by Him to show what God's kingdom looks like. God's kingdom is more than just a physical space of ground. God's kingdom is wherever God rules in the hearts and minds of His people. Then they go out and make a difference in the part of the world in which He's placed them.

In **Isaiah 58** that we read earlier, God declared that being a self-giving person will shine His light into people's darkness. Similarly, Jesus declares that same principle in **Matthew 5:16** where he says, **Matthew 5:16 (NIV)** *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.* Notice, shining the light of Jesus before those living in darkness, causes them not to praise us, but causes them to sit up and take notice and praise God. That implies that while shining our light, we are intentionally pointing out to them who is the source of our light – and it's not us but God.

In **Matthew 25** Jesus is talking about what's going to happen when he returns to earth and God's judgment takes place and he says this:

Matthew 25:31-33 (NIV) *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

Now, consistently in Scripture the sheep are God's children and the goats are not. In the next couple of verses we'll discover what criteria God uses to separate the sheep from the goats. Some of you already know the answer to this but how many think the criteria for separation is:

- our knowledge of the Bible? NO
- How many think it's based on our church attendance? NO
- How many think it's based on how much money you gave to the church? NO

Listen as I read the next couple of verses for what the criteria is for God dividing the sheep from the goats. **Read Matthew 25:34-40**

Similar to the **Isaiah 58** passage I referred to earlier, it's based on how we show God's love to the world. Specifically Jesus mentions **6 things**:

1. did you feed the hungry,
2. did you give a drink to the thirsty,
3. did you show hospitality to strangers,
4. did you clothe the naked,
5. did you look after the sick and
6. did you visit those in prison.

In other words, were we God's light to a hurting and broken world. I take that to be both Christians and non-Christians alike. Now, someone may object and claim that this sounds more like we're saved by our actions and not by grace. I would counter that God is using our actions as an indicator of where our heart really is. If we genuinely accept God's grace, it ought to transform the way we live our lives. And if it's really a fake acceptance of God's grace, then there will be no real genuine transformation of our hearts and minds which should automatically show up in our actions.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned that *not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.'* (Mt 7:21)

And then Jesus says that in that moment in time there will be many that will object that they did all sorts of amazing things that should prove they are followers of Christ – such as prophesying, casting out demons and performing miracles, but Jesus isn't impressed. Apparently meeting the needs of others ranks much higher in God's estimation than just doing miraculous works in His name.

When Jesus was in the Upper Room with his disciples, preparing them for his imminent death, He told them that it was their radical, self-giving love, for one another that would be the criterion by which the world would be able to judge whether or not they are one of his disciples (**John 13:34-35**). Notice, it's not just loving each other, but it's loving each other **in the same manner, or the full extent**, that Jesus demonstrated his love for them. They wouldn't fully understand what that looked like yet, but in a matter of hours they would see Jesus willingly give up his life for them. After that Jesus earlier definition of what it means to be a follower of His became much clearer. (**Luke 9:23**)

Many years later, it's pretty clear that the apostle John, who wrote the gospel of John, understood the implications of Jesus' instructions concerning showing His love to the world.

1 John 3:16-18 (NIV) *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

He's saying, it's not enough to claim you're a follower of Jesus – it must show up in how you live your life. It's got to show up in **self-giving actions** to others.

James, the brother of Jesus, also understood the implications of Jesus' teaching.

James 2:14-17 (NIV) *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

3. Self-giving in the Early Church

If you read through the history of the early church you'll quickly discover that the church took these teachings to heart and made it a key part of their teaching and practices and in their witness to the world.

Acts 4:33-35 (NIV) *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.*

Notice that God's empowering grace working within them is what's the motivation behind their **self-giving** approach to living. Historical records outside of the Bible also attest to this ongoing commitment to reaching out with their money and time to demonstrate God's love and to be a light in the darkness of people's lives.

Tertullian was a prolific Christian author around 200 A.D. and his writings include many references to the **self-giving witness** of those early Christians. "It is our care for the helpless, our practice of loving kindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say 'look how they love one another!'. 'Look how they are prepared to die for one another!'"

Later in that same writing **Tertullian** talks about the practice within many of the churches that Christians would willingly put money into a fund each month and this money would be distributed the leadership in various ways: feeding and burying poor people, helping with the care of boys and girls who have no parents, supporting the elderly who couldn't get around, helping people who became shipwrecked and those who were working in mines, exiled on islands or in prison.

One history writer estimated that around 250 A.D., that the Roman church supported about 100 clergy and 1,500 poor people which came to a yearly cost somewhere between **1.5 to 2 million dollars**.

The Roman emperor, Julian the Apostate, who served from 361 to 363 A.D. was very antagonistic toward Christianity. But even he recognized the outward love of Christians when he wrote: "These godless Galileans feed not only their own poor but ours; our poor lack our care." So even someone who wanted to extinguish Christianity recognizes the powerful love displayed by these Christians.

When the **deadly Cyprian plague** swept through Rome beginning about 250 A.D., many non-Christians tried desperately to save themselves. If one of their own family contracted the disease they would kick them out of their home and leave them to die. But Christians became well known by their willingness to take in those who were sick and minister to their many needs as well as bury them. As a result, many of these Christians got sick as well and died. But it was more important to show God's love to these sick and dying individuals than to save their own lives. To these individuals, Jesus' call to take up your cross daily and follow Him became a daily commitment.

4. Self-giving in our lives

The early church took Christ's call to show his sacrificial love to the world seriously. But somewhere along the way churches and individual Christians have adopted the world's self-centered approach to living their lives for Jesus. People tend to "shop" for churches based on whether or not they meet my personal needs. Do they sing the types of songs I feel comfortable with, are the services not too long or not too short but just the right length (kind of Goldilocks with the porridge), are the minister's sermon engaging, short and to the point, is the seating in the auditorium comfortable enough, are there a significant amount of people within my own age range and the list goes on and on. And the average Christian will put a small amount of money into the offering plate when it's passed and figure that by attending church semi-regularly and giving some money, "*I've done my part for the Lord.*" And when they leave the church building they hit a switch and switch back over to their secular self for the rest of the week – where they live life the way they want to. Most people don't even know someone is a disciple of Christ unless they happen to mention that they attended church last Sunday. Rather than standing out from society we've become Christian chameleons who blend in quite nicely.

But the call from **Romans 12:1-2** is for followers of Christ not to blend in but to stand out and to have the same self-giving attitude that Jesus had.

So, how do we get back to Christ's call on our lives to be a people that serve others rather than just ourselves?

1. **Daily remember that Jesus gave his all for you** so that you could have the privilege of having a restored relationship with your Heavenly Father.
2. **Ask God to create within you a compelling desire to meet others' needs.**
3. **Ask God to make you aware of the needs around you daily..**
4. **Ask God to show you how He wants to creatively meet those needs.** There's no cookie cutter approach to showing God's love to others. What may be effective for one person may be a turn off to someone else.
5. **Go give of yourself, displaying God's love**

Loving Like Jesus #4 – Being Self-Giving

1. Self-Giving in the _____:

What type of “fast” is God looking for from us?

2. Self-Giving in the _____:

What is the “*kingdom of God*”?

What is the purpose of letting God’s light shine in us?

By what criteria will God divide the sheep and the goats?

What criteria did Jesus say the world would be able to determine if we’re one of his followers?

3. Self-giving in the _____:

How did the early Christians view their money and the use of it?

4. Self-giving in _____:

What does Romans 12:1-2 call us to do?

Becoming Self-Giving for the Lord:

1. Daily remember that Jesus gave _____ for you.
2. Ask God to create within you a _____ to meet other’s needs.
3. Ask God to make you _____ of the needs around you daily.
4. Ask God to show you _____ He wants to creatively meet those needs.
5. _____ give of yourself, displaying God’s love.

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