

“How to Tell God You Love Him - Part 1”

Matthew 22:34-40

preached on October 4, 2009

Jesus and Peter were together on the shore when Jesus asked, “Do you love me more than any other thing, more than all things?” If Jesus asked you that, how would you answer? Because Jesus will ask that sometime, maybe several times in the course of your life. For the Bible says that we were created as an object of God’s love. God made us to love us. He wants to have a relationship with us. We were created to be in a relationship with God. The most important thing we can know in life is that God loves us. And the most important thing that we can do in life, is to love Him back. Jesus said *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”* Nothing is more important. And when we express our love to God, it is called worship. It is our primary purpose in life. If we learn to love God and let God love us, our life has fulfilled its meaning, its purpose. If we miss this, life is a failure, because we’ve missed the very reason for which God created us - to love and be loved.

But it’s hard for some people to say, “I love you.” Sometimes we feel it, but don’t know how to show it or say it. It’s difficult. For some it’s because they weren’t raised that way. Maybe there was love in the home, maybe not, but whatever, it wasn’t verbalized much. And many of us were taught to suppress our emotions, to hide our feelings. Some have been hurt in the past and now they don’t want to express their love because they don’t want to be hurt again. And some might be angry with God because of what He allowed to happen in their life, and in our world.

Today we’re going to talk about how to express love to God. We are going to look at 6 ways, 3 this week and 3 more next weeks. With each way, I encourage you to take a self-test, to evaluate yourself. As a result of this message, I hope you will feel loved by God more than you ever have in your life. And I hope that you will learn to express love to God more than you ever have in your life, learn a deeper level of worship. How can we love God?

1. BY SINGING TO HIM. United Methodists are pretty good at that. Music and love go together because music comes from the heart. It’s not something we do intellectually. It comes out of our soul, our heart. Long ago Paul McCartney wrote, “You’d think that people would have had enough of silly love songs. But I look around me and I see it isn’t so. Some people want to fill the world with silly love songs. What’s wrong with that?” The world is filled with love songs. And more love songs have been written about Jesus than any other topic? Over the last 2000 years there have been more love songs written to Jesus, about Jesus than any thing else. Christianity is a singing religion, a singing faith. Why? Because it’s not about religion. It’s a love affair. It’s about a relationship with God, that God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for us, and He wants us to love Him in return.

Psalm 147:7 says *“Sing out your thanks to Him. Sing praises to our God.”* Nothing will make you more aware of God’s love and presence in your life than singing and praise. Some might say that they

“How to Tell God You Love Him - Part 1”

Matthew 22:34-40

preached on October 4, 2009

can't sing. That's all right. The Bible says, “*Make a joyful noise.*” All of us can do that. We go to football games or weddings or surprise parties and we make a joyful noise. So just let it out. We don't have to hit the right note. We just have to make a joyful noise.

Often when I preach and teach, I try to lift up Christian principles. I believe that principles for living are extremely important. We need principles for our head, for our understanding. But we also need music for the heart. We need to worship God. Music inspires, refreshes, rejuvenates, revitalizes. Music and worship in praise to God have a healing element. If we're depressed we need to sing. And when we least feel like singing, that's when we need to do it the most. When I don't feel like participating in worship, when I don't feel like getting involved, when I just want to stand still and be a spectator, that means my heart is cold and it needs to be warmed up. I need to get involved and let my mood be lifted in worship. I need music.

Worship is setting aside all the busyness and distractions of life and giving our complete attention to the Lord. It's an opportunity to focus on how much we love the Lord and how grateful we are for all he's done. It's drawing so close to Him that the whole world falls away, where fears, frustrations, and failures disappear. It is allowing the peace of God to sweep over us so we can feel that deep abiding joy, joy, joy, joy, down in your heart - so strong, so powerful, that music springs forth from the depth of the soul, even in the toughest of times.

Can we worship somewhere other than church? Certainly. Worship is simply expressing our love to God. So wherever God is, we can worship. We can worship in the shower or while mowing the back yard. We can worship washing dishes; driving to work or driving a golf ball; making a sale or going to one. We can express our love to God everywhere. And that means we can sing everywhere, even if God is the only ones hearing the music.

Question: how often do you sing your thanks and love to God? Daily? Regularly? Occasionally? Rarely? Check which one represents your current view and put a star where you'd like it to be. When you really think about what God has done in your life, what He's done for you, you can't help yourself. The joy just breaks forth in song. We have to praise. We have to rejoice. We have to worship.

2. We express love to God is BY TALKING TO HIM. After many years, I finally figured out that this marriage thing is all about communication. The key ingredient to marriage is talk. Honest communication allows relationships to grow. When there is no communication, relationships decay. You see, a relationship is never standing still. It's either growing or decaying. The same is true in our relationship with God. On the days when we have deep, meaningful talks with God, our relationship grows. When we have little or no communication, our relationship decays. It's that simple.

When we really love somebody we don't just spend time with them. We talk with them. Remember when you first fell in love as a teenager and your parents got upset because you were always on the

“How to Tell God You Love Him - Part 1”

Matthew 22:34-40

preached on October 4, 2009

phone? It's like you had a phone in your ear. Of course with cell phones today I see bunches of people going through life with a phone in their ear. But in high school you did that because you wanted to get to know that person, so you communicated with them. If your husband or wife never talks to you, you have every reason to start wondering, "Do they love me?" That's why, husbands, you need to talk to your wife! She needs a daily dose of vitamins, calcium, and communication. Understand that Nancy's now saying, "Who is that guy up there?"

What do we talk to God about? Anything. Anything that we'd talk to our best friend about. Everything. Our hopes, fears, dreams, anxieties, the things we're proud of, the things we're ashamed of, our goals, our ambitions, our hurts, our cares, every part of our life - we talk to God about it all. Psalm 116 says *"I love the Lord because He hears me and answers my prayer, because He bends down and listens. I will pray as long as I have breath."* If we don't feel close to God and some may not this morning, we've lost our spark, then life becomes routine, dull, joyless, lifeless. There's a simple remedy for that. Start talking to God again. Just talk. Forget the proper language, the "thee's and thou's" and the trite little clichés that we repeat over and over. Just talk to him. Prayer is not a duty that we have to do. It's a privilege that we can do. We get to talk to the Creator of the universe. He has invited us. He wants to talk with us. I remember the first time the Bishop asked me to come to his office and talk. I was even more excited than I was scared. But this is way beyond the Bishop. This is the Creator of the Universe and He invites us into His office to talk any time, all the time.

Question: How often do you talk to God each day? Once? Twice? Ten times a day? In the morning, afternoon, evening? Do you do it regularly? Occasionally? Rarely? Put a circle around what it is now and an arrow by the one where you'd like to go. You say, "I'd like to pray more, to talk to God more, but I just don't have the time." Then you're too busy. We'll never have the time to pray; we have to take the time to pray.

And 3, we express our love to God is BY PUBLICLY IDENTIFYING WITH HIM. By not being ashamed of Him at work, at home, or in the community. Paul wrote and Carmen sang, "No way we are not ashamed, of the gospel or his name. Holy hands are lifted high, to the name of Jesus Christ." But where we are all called to be in service to God, some are in the secret service. Nobody knows about it. If that is you, then you don't really love God. Because if we love somebody we're not ashamed of them. We publicly identify with them. We can't say we love Jesus Christ and yet be ashamed of Him. Jesus said, *"If anyone is ashamed of me and my teachings then I will be ashamed of him when I come in the glory of my Father."* If you're ashamed of me on earth, I'm going to be ashamed of you in heaven. We need to publicly identify ourselves with Christ. That's how we show our love for Him.

Jesus understood the power of symbolism and he gave us two very powerful symbols. The first is communion. Communion helps us identify with what Jesus Christ did for us. There are three things: A. He saved us from the penalty of sin. Everything we've ever done wrong was paid for on the cross so we are forgiven and set free. B. He saves us from the power of sin. He breaks its grip in our lives.

“How to Tell God You Love Him - Part 1”

Matthew 22:34-40

preached on October 4, 2009

He gives us a new power to be able to make changes so we're not the same anymore. We can do the things that we always wanted to do but never thought we could do on our own. And C, because our sins are forgiven and forgotten, as though they never happened, we can have a home in heaven, where there will be no sin, no sorrow, no suffering, no pain, no grief. That's the good news.

When we take communion we remember what Jesus did for us. What should be my attitude when I take the Lord's Supper? Should I feel guilty, remembering all the wrong things I've done in my life? No. They've already been paid for, forgiven and forgotten by Jesus. Why should we continue to hold on to them? Should I feel grief, thinking about all the torture and suffering that Jesus went through for me? No. Because He didn't stay dead. He came back to life. When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we should be of an attitude of gratitude. Grateful for all that God has done, that God would love me this much before I even knew him; to come, to suffer, to die on the cross for me. When we take communion we publicly identify our faith in Christ; we publicly identify our love for Christ; we publicly state that we want to be closer to Christ.

On the night Jesus was arrested he lifted a cup and said, "This cup represents the blood I will shed for you. When you drink this, remember that I spilled my blood for you. I gave my life for you. This is how much I love you. When you eat, when you drink, remember me." Because of what Jesus did for us, life will never be the same again. We are different people. Forgiven people. That is something we all have to be grateful for. And I'm glad I'm never going to be the same again. Jesus has the power to change things in my life that nothing in the world can change except Jesus. No fad, no therapy, no pill, nothing can change lives the way Jesus Christ can because he is God. Jesus turns failures into successes. He changes tearful, fearful, timid, weak, cowardly people into confident ones. He turns selfish, egotistical, prideful people into gentle, loving servants. He turns wife-beaters into loving husbands and distant dads into caring fathers. He turns drug addicts into responsible citizens.

How many of you would say that Jesus has changed your life? How many would say that you know somebody whose life has been radically changed by Christ? That is why we are here. We're not here to impress anybody. We're not here to go through some ritual. We're not here to build buildings for ourselves, our ancestors, our traditions. We're not here to be the clique or the religious country club. We're here because the only one who can make the changes in human behavior that we need in our society is Jesus Christ. He starts in our lives and then moves to our family, our friends, our culture. And I am not ashamed to identify with Him.

There's another way to identify ourselves as believers. Baptism. What is baptism all about? What's the big deal? I shower daily. Why do I need to get wet for God? In baptism we identify with Jesus. Romans 6:3 *“Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”* And Colossians 2 says, *“You have been given fullness in Christ, ... having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”* Baptism is a public declaration that we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus; that we believe in Easter.

“How to Tell God You Love Him - Part 1”

Matthew 22:34-40

preached on October 4, 2009

Many people show up on Easter who don't have a clue of what it is really all about. But baptism is our identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Baptism also symbolizes our new life in Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:27 *"Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe, Christ's life, the fulfillment of God's original promise."* Are you wearing your sins, or do you dress eternally in the power, the glory, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? When we grow in Christ we are expected to be dressed in the glory and grace of God. But even before that, we baptize children to identify them with the kingdom of God, to show that they belong in God's family, that God's grace is available to them. The promise is made that the child will be raised in the church, in the kingdom, that they might learn to identify with Jesus as they live and grow day by day and year by year.

In a little while we will identify with Jesus through communion. We partake to remember and rejoice in all that God has done for us. It is important to see how Jesus, how God has shown His love for us. But how do we show our love for God? Through singing to Him, talking with Him, publicly identifying with Him. It is what we are called to do, *"To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, spirit, strength."* In this day, this week, let us strive to show that love a little better, a little stronger, that we might grow a little closer to the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.