

“Love Life”
Philippians 1:9-11
March 21, 2004
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His name is Raj.

I would judge he is nearing 40 years of age.

He has a wife, and as I recall, he has two children.

Raj is bright, educated and very capable.

He grew up in the slower more pastoral south of India but was led by God to move to the bustling, congested capitol city of New Delhi in the north.

There he lives in a small 2nd floor walkup apartment that most of us would consider a slum.

For the past five years he has left that apartment in the morning and traveled by motor scooter to the nearby real slums of suburban New Delhi.

I cannot adequately describe those 10 foot by 10 foot crumbling brick cubicles that pass for homes, each one attached to the next.

There are no medical facilities, no schools; contaminated water is retrieved from a storage tank blocks away.

85% of the working age population are unemployed.

These are the Dahlits, the outcasts, the untouchables of Indian society.

Into that pit Raj goes each morning, door to door, asking who he can pray for and telling them that God loves them.

Nine days ago, 20 others and I stood in the alleys that pass for streets in one of those slums and watched Raj as he called many of those people by name.

He pulled a small crowd around and had several share their testimonies of coming to faith in Jesus.

Later I learned from an associate of his that Raj had taken three young converts and out of his own meager income was paying for them to be in a Bible school to train them to evangelize their own people.

As I stood there in the heat that day and watched Raj, I couldn't help but ask myself, "What keeps Raj coming to this place and to other places in this city like it?"

And then I realized what it is. Raj is a lover!

I looked at Raj, I saw it in his eyes; he loves these people.

I was feeling the oppressive heat, I smelled a putrefying stench, and I was seeing squalor and poverty.

But seemingly oblivious to all of that, Raj was seeing individuals – an old lady, an out-of-work man, a young child – and he loved them.

He's not just doing a job, or building a church, or fulfilling a mission, or being noble – he loves those people.

That's what we are called to.

Of course I don't mean that we are all called to be missionaries in New Dehli.

I mean we are all called to be lovers; to be lovers of people – especially each other.

I know that the world and even the church have used the word love in so many ways that the word has become almost meaningless.

Or stated another way, the word "love" no longer means anything because it means everything.

- God is love.
- Love one another.
- What the world needs now is love, sweet love.
- Why can't everybody just love everybody?
- We love God and we love rye bread.
- We love our neighbor and we love "sleeping in" in the morning.
- We "fall in love", we are "in love", and we "make love".

So when we are called to love, we dismiss it either because it has no meaning to us or because we consider it so idealistic as to be unrealistic.

But I urge you; please don't dismiss this topic or me too quickly this morning.

I'm talking about what is probably the most important issue of life.

I'm talking about what makes us human, what can make us most fully alive.

I'm talking about what we were created for.

We were made to be loved and to love – there is nothing more foundational or more essential to life than what is being urged on us in the verses before us today.

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the people in Philippi.

In it he began with a description of his own affection for them.

And early on he prayed for them.

It is that prayer that leads me to this topic today.

Philippians 1:9-11

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.”

But it is the first phrase of the prayer that has captured my attention today – “that your love may abound more and more...”

Paul said something similar to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 “Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. **Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.**”

Apparently the Philippians knew how to love people who were far away:

2 Corinthians 8:3-4 “I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴

they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

But also apparently they had more difficulty with those at home because Paul found it necessary to write:

Philippians 4:2 "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

"To live above with saints we love
Oh, that will be grace and glory;
To live below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story."

Here at Gables we talk much about being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

If you were going to use one word, phrase or idea to describe what a faithful follower of Jesus is like, what would it be?

Would it be the word obedient? Or maybe holy?

Would it be the word disciplined?

Would it be the word committed?

To describe a faithful follower would you say it is one who:

- knows the Word of God?
- strives to be holy like Jesus is holy?
- seeks the Kingdom of God?
- seeks to make disciples?
- Or is an evangelist?

All of these descriptions are good but I think they are secondary to the fundamental characteristic of a faithful follower.

Jesus, speaking of his followers, said, a student "who is fully trained will be like his teacher." (Luke 6:40)

What was it about Jesus that he wanted his followers most to emulate?

Just before his death, Jesus met with his disciples.

Even if the disciples didn't know what was coming, Jesus did.

And these were precious moments with his closest followers.

If ever there was a time he wished to impress upon them the most important truths of what it meant to his disciples this was it.

We are told in John 13 that Jesus poured water in a basin and began to wash the feet of his disciples and dried them with a towel.

When he had finished he returned to his place and he said, John 13:12-17 "Do you understand what I have done for you?" "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

And if they still didn't get it, he said it most plainly moments later:

John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

What is the most fundamental characteristic of a faithful follower of Jesus?

A Christian is a lover.

John Powell has written, "(Jesus) wanted to underline this truth: My kingdom is a kingdom of love. It is not a place where power rules or people compete... There is **only one badge of identification**: 'by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another as I have loved you.'" John 13:35" (Powell in [Unconditional Love](#), p41)

They will **not** know you are my disciples

- by the way you can articulate biblical doctrine,
- or the way you can sing or teach,
- or by the way you don't do certain things like smoke, drink or chew or go with girls who do,
- or by how often you are in church,
- or the music you listen to,
- or the way you can pray.

They will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Is love what most characterizes me and you?

Maybe we are known for being quick-witted, for being bright, for being efficient, hard-working, funny, productive, creative, for being – you name it.

Are we known for loving?

I look at the fruit of the Spirit, the results of having our attitudes and actions controlled by the Spirit of God, and I see:

Galatians 5:22-23 “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

None of those words are about production or efficiency; they are nearly all about relationships – about aspects of love.

Even when the Apostle Paul compares the loftiest dimensions of theology he names only one as the greatest.

1 Corinthians 13:13 “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

So crucial is this characteristic of a faithful follower of Jesus that the Apostle John gives this warning:

1 John 4:7-8 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. **Whoever does not love does not know God,** because God is love.

And again in 1 John 4:20 "If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For **anyone who does not love his brother**, whom he has seen, **cannot love God**, whom he has not seen."

I think these verses and others are saying that if we aren't lovers we aren't Christians.

To know God is to be a lover.

With hair down to his shoulder blades, Tommy proved himself to be the "atheist in residence" in the Theology of Faith course at Loyola University in Chicago.

Tommy was a serious "pain in the back pew" for the professor and when he turned in his final exam he said with a smirk, "Do you think I'll ever find God?"

The professor thought he'd use a little shock on him so answered, "No!"

Tommy said, "I thought that was the product you were pushing.

The professor let him get about five steps away from the classroom door and then said, "Tommy, I don't think you'll ever find God but I am absolutely certain he will find you."

Later Tommy graduated and later still he contracted terminal cancer.

Before the professor could find him, Tommy walked back into his office.

His body was sadly wasted and his long hair had fallen out.

The professor blurted out, "Tommy, I've thought about you often. I hear you are sick."

"Oh yes, very sick. I have cancer in both lungs. It's a matter of weeks."

"Can you talk about it, Tommy?"

"Sure, what would you like to know?"

"What's it like to be only 24 and dying?"

"Well it could be worse."

“How?”

“Well, I could be forty and have no values or ideals or fifty, and think that booze, seducing women and making money were the biggies in life.”

“But what I really came to see you about was something you said to me the last day of class; you said I wouldn’t find God, but he’d find me. I’ve thought about that a lot.”

“When I found out I had cancer, I got serious about finding God.

“When it spread into my lungs, I began banging my bloody fists against the bronze doors of heaven. But God didn’t come out.

“After trying so hard, I finally gave up. I just quit. I decided that I just wouldn’t care anymore, wouldn’t care about God, about an after life, or anything like that.”

“I decided to spend what time I had left doing something more profitable.

“I remembered that one time in class you said, “The essential sadness is to go through life without loving. And it would be equally sad to leave this world without telling those you loved that you had loved them.

“So I began with the hardest one: my dad.

He was reading the paper when I approached him.

“Dad”

“Yes, what? Dad asked without even lowering his newspaper.

“Dad, I’d like to talk with you.

“Well, talk”

“Dad, it’s really important.

The newspaper came down three inches; “What is it?”

“Dad, I love you. I just wanted you to know.”

The newspaper fluttered to the floor and my father did two things I could never remember him ever doing before. He cried AND he hugged me. And we talked all night long even though he had to go to work the next morning.

“It wasn’t long after that that I turned around one day and God was there.

He didn’t come to me when I pleaded. I guess I was like an animal trainer holding out a hoop demanding God to jump through in my timing.

Apparently God does things in his own way at his own hour. But the important thing is that he was there. He found me.”

The professor said, “Tommy, I think you have just said something very important. **The surest way to find God is not to make him a private possession, or a problem solver, or an instant consolation in time of need, but rather by opening yourself to love.**”

The Bible says in 1 John 4:16 “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” (John Powell, [Unconditional Love](#) p110ff)

If we want a relationship with God, if we want to be fully human, it will begin by opening ourselves up to love – to his love and love for others.

What’s my life principle, my life goal?

- Is it to be a successful businessman, pastor, teacher or scholar?
- Is it to acquire a house, two cars, a boat and a vacation home?
- Is it to have a secure retirement fund?

Or is it to be a lover like Jesus?

Oh, I stand before you convicted by my own words.

It is so easy to give ourselves to so many other things – even things that are good.

But they are not the best.

God is an outgoing, giving, God.

Out of a motivation of love, he creates and he recreates.

We were made “in the image of God.”

We were created to reflect Him, to be like Him, to be an expression of who He is.

To be fully human, to be most alive, we must be “in love” – being loved and loving.

To be like Christ is to be “in love.”

Sure, we can give our lives to other things.

But in so doing we will die.

Yes, loving is dangerous business, but the alternative is isolation.

And we were created to live in relationship – with God and each other.

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to (risking the tragedies of love) is damnation. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations (disturbances) of love is Hell.” (C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves p111-112)

We were created to be loved and to love – to be lovers.

Are you a lover?

As I quoted earlier: “There is **only one badge of identification** ‘by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another as I have loved you.’”

We know that from this earth, only the Word of God and people will last forever and yet loving people consistently seems to be one of our most difficult tasks. Oh we love humanity; it’s the difficult neighbor next door, the obnoxious co-worker in the next office, the petty person at church and the overbearing relative that we struggle with.

Paul’s prayer is my prayer for you and for me:

“May your love abound more and more...”