

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: 1 John 4:7-8, 21.

“HOW TO BE MORE LOVING”

1 John 4:7-8, 21 *“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 he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.”*

Today is special because we are celebrating **Valentine’s Day**. I know it may seem like an afterthought but it’s the thought that counts, right? Besides, we’re still in the love month. And so I have prepared a special message for those who are in love and for those not in love...anymore. Hoping that this message will ignite again that spark in your love life. And for those whose relationships are constantly aflame, may this message continue to keep that fire burning. So, this message is for those who are married. If you’re not married, this message is for you too because according to *Newsweek* magazine, 96% of all people in America eventually get married.

The truth is, this message targets everyone, whether you’re married or not, young or old, because I’ll share with you principles that you can apply to make you a more loving person. Not only to your loved one but also to people around you, even to those you find it hard to love.

Now, what is love? Love is a word we use for so many different things. I love my wife, I love my country, I love hot dogs and tacos, I love the flag, I love my dog, I love my car. We love so many different things. What does it mean?

I. WHAT IS LOVE?

There are a lot of misconceptions about what real love is.

Some people think love is a feeling. **It's not.** Love is not a feeling.

We think love is an ocean of emotion—an emotion I can't handle.

No doubt about it: Love causes feelings. Love produces tremendous feelings. But love is not a feeling. It's much more than that.

Another misconception is that **love is uncontrollable**. In other words, you can't handle it, it just comes -- "I fell in love" -- I had no control over it.

You hear people say things like, "I can't help it, I'm in love" or, "I can't help it, I just don't love him anymore." As if love is uncontrollable.

The Bible says that is not true. The Bible says that love is two things. This is what God says:

1. **Love is a matter of choice.** Col. 3:14 *"And over all these put on love which binds them together."* It's something you put on like a coat. You have a choice. It's the commitment to care and it is controllable -- who you will love and who you will not love.

2. **Love is a matter of conduct.** It's an action. It's something you do. It's more than just feelings. It's more than just words.

¹ John 3:18 *"Let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and truth."*

Love is something you do. It is behavior. It's not just talk. A guy says to his fiancée, "I'd die for you, my love!" She says, "You're always saying that but you never do it!" Love is something you do, **it's an action**, an effort. It's more than words or talk.

If love were just a feeling then it could not be commanded. But the Bible commands you to love. Have you ever tried to command a feeling? You can't command a feeling. You can't force a feeling. Love is not a feeling. It's something you do.

Today I want us to look at how do you love someone you don't like. Do you really have to love them? Can't I just ignore them? Do I have to like them? Jesus never demanded that you have warm feelings toward everybody, but He did say you will love everyone. You have to **learn to love them**.

The fact is, our lives are full of people we don't like. We don't like the way people act, the way they dress, the way they talk, the way they smell. We don't like some people. Most of all we don't like people who don't like us.

Let me share with you a joke I've shared before. I hope you'll laugh again. Winston Churchill and Lady Astor had a famous rivalry going on. One day Lady Astor said, "If I were your wife I'd put arsenic in your beer."

Churchill said, "If you were my wife, I'd drink it." The rest of the story goes like this: Lady Astor told Prime Minister Churchill, "You are quite drunk." Churchill replied, "I may be quite drunk. However, you are quite ugly. And I will be sober in the morning."

Let's face it. There are people you don't like. There are people I don't like. But the Bible says, you will learn to love even the unloveable. How?

II. HOW TO LOVE SOMEONE YOU DON'T LIKE

1. Experience God's love yourself

There's no time that God doesn't love you. You need to accept His love and let Him love you. You need to feel and understand how deeply God loves you. Ephesians 3:17-18 (Living Bible) *"I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your heart, living within you as you trust Him. May your roots go deep into the soil of God's marvelous love, and may you be able to feel and understand how long, wide, deep and high His love really is, and experience this love for yourselves."*

God wants you to not just know that He loves you. You all know that God loves you. He wants you to feel it, really feel it in your heart. But didn't I say love is not a feeling? Yes, it is not if you're the giver. If you're the receiver it's important you feel it. Why is that so important? Because you tend to love back.

There was a time when I couldn't feel God's love anymore. After so many years of being away from God, my heart has become callous and unfeeling toward God. I had the notion that God doesn't really love me. I had so many personal setbacks that I thought God didn't care whatever happened to me. The result is that I couldn't love him back. Then, he sent me as a missionary to Russia.

But even as a missionary, I had a hard time feeling his love. I led our missions team in singing, but I wasn't feeling the worship experience. I was

doing it because my teammates chose me. One day I prayed, "Lord, I want to love you like before. Please help me to love you again."

What happened was that God sent his love to me through the people he sent my way that I ministered to. And for every person that God sent me, a child, a teenager, an old man, it was as if God was saying, "I love you." And the old feelings returned. I began to feel God's love again and as a result I was able to share this with others.

If it's hard for you to know and feel God's love, ask him to give you the feelings. He promises in Ezekiel 36:26,

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

The starting point, before you can ever love anybody else, you must understand how much God loves you, how much you matter to God.

2. Forgive others who've hurt you

Colossians 3:13 *"Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

Why is this? Because it is impossible to love one person while hating somebody else at the same time. You cannot love your kids fully if you're still resenting your parents. I can't love my wife fully if I'm still reacting to my former girlfriend.

I cannot love somebody and be resentful of somebody else at the same time. A bitter heart is a divided heart. Somebody says, "Why can't I love my husband?" You're still holding on to the past. "Why can't I love my wife?" You're still reacting to the past. You've got to let go. It's not fair to those around you. You've got to let go because it's important.

Statistics tell us that one out of every three women will be abused in their lifetime. One out of every seven men will be abused in their lifetime.

You've got to let go and forgive others. A divided heart is a resentful heart. You cannot fully love somebody else if you're still reacting to somebody in the past.

Experience God's love. Jesus said, *"Love others as I have loved you."* Unless you know how much Jesus loved you, you don't know how to love others.

Then He says, Forgive as I have forgiven you. When you think about how much God has forgiven you, you can forgive others.

3. Think loving thoughts.

Philippians 2:4-5 *"Don't just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others too, and in what they are doing. Your attitude should be the same kind that was shown to us by Jesus Christ."*

How do you think loving thoughts toward an unloving person? By the way, if God's going to teach you real love, He'll put you around some unlovely people. It's easy to love people who are just like you. But God's going to teach you real love by putting unlovely people around you. How do you learn to think loving thoughts towards those kinds of people? By focusing on their hurts, their problems, their needs. You say, What are their hurts, their problems? You don't just think of your own affairs. Where are they hurting? Where are they needing? Hurt people hurt people! When somebody's hurting you it's because they're hurting.

It's easier to love them when you look beyond the hurtful things they're doing to you and see where they are hurting and you can be more sympathetic.

The fact is, those who deserve your love the least are those who need it the most. They need massive doses of love in order to heal their emotions and restore relationships. My prayer is that Fil-Am will be a place where massive doses of love are given to those who are hurting.

Now, if you want to be more loving, you must begin with your thoughts. You have to decide -- I'm going to be loving!

I'm going to feel loving toward that person! As I said already, **love is a choice, an act of the will.** So, you have to start with the way you think. If you change the way you think, it will automatically change the way you feel.

You don't try to force your feelings, that doesn't work. You have to see it from their perspective and become sympathetic to their needs. The feelings will change.

4. I must begin acting in a loving way.

Even though I don't feel it, I'm supposed to act loving. Isn't that being hypocritical if I'm acting loving toward a person and I don't feel loving toward them? That's not hypocritical. That's loving in advance. Loving by faith. Loving by faith is the most powerful movement of the world.

The most important thing I'll say to you today: It is easier to act my way into a feeling than it is to feel my way into an action. Even though I don't feel like it, I act loving, then the feelings come. Some husbands say, "When I feel considerate toward my wife, then I'll start acting considerate!" Hell will

freeze over before you feel it! You've got to take the initiative with your actions. Some wives say, "When I feel romantic toward my husband, then I'll start acting sweet again toward him!" **It's not going to happen.**

You act your way into a feeling, not feel your way.

Some of you are waiting for the feelings of romance to come back and they're not going to come. You must act your way into those feelings. They don't just pop into you. You cannot change a feeling by force.

You have to change it by first changing the way you think and that will change your feelings, and changing the way you act and that will change your feelings.

Luke 6:27-28, Jesus gives us a key example on how to do this. "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*" He gives four specific, positive actions here to handling unlovely people, people who are just being problematic.

What this verse is, is an example of what psychologists call today assertiveness. Assertiveness means choosing the way I want to respond rather than simply reacting to something. You're either an actor or a reactor in life.

Normally, if somebody hurts you, you hurt them back. If somebody says something bad to you, you say something bad back. Anybody can do that. Anybody can react the way other people react toward us. But assertiveness is when you choose your response, you take the high road and you say, I'm going to be the better person in this relationship and I'm going to assert and do the right thing no matter what you do or say to me.

Notice that this way you are in control. When other people are making you mad, they are in control. When you are choosing your response, you're in control.

Remember the story of Job in the Old Testament. He lost everything -- his children, his wealth, his family. He had a nagging wife left and that's all he had left. He had three so called "friends" who were critical of him. With friends like them who needs enemies! They said, "Job, your problem is that you're a sinner and you're having bad things happen to you because you're a bad person." That's bad theology even in the 21st century, much less back then.

A lot of bad things happen to good people. And they're not all the result of personal sin. But they're criticizing him.

The Bible says in the last chapter of Job, that God healed Job and restored all his wealth and all his family and everything when he prayed for his critics -- those very people, his friends who were criticizing him. Job 42:10 says, *"After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before."* Not when Job prayed for himself "God bless me!" but when he prayed for the very people who were putting him down. God said, "If you care enough about other people, I'll take care of your needs."

You choose to act in loving ways. Everybody, think of that person you're having the most difficult time with. Don't look around. Say to God, "Fill me with Your love. Help me to realize how much I'm loved." Forgive those in your past and start thinking loving thoughts and doing loving actions.

I Corinthians 13. This is the classic chapter on love in the Bible. It's the one everybody ought to study if you're going to learn how to become a great lover. Beginning in verse 4, it says, *"Love is patient, love is kind, love does not envy, love does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self seeking. It is not easily angered. Love keeps no record of wrongs."* Do you keep a record of wrongs so you can use them? That's not the loving thing to do. *"... Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. Love always protects. Love always trusts. Love always hopes. Love always perseveres. That kind of love never fails."*

In this passage, there are 16 actions -- things to do -- because **love is something you do**. It is not a feeling; it is a way of acting toward people. It's patient, it's kind, it's not rude, all of these 16 actions are ways you can learn to be loving.

5. You expect the best from them.

I Cor. 13:7 (Living Bible) *"If you love someone you will always believe in him, and always expect the best of him."*

We tend to live up to what other people expect of us. Dads, if you say to your kids, "You're really dumb!", do you think that's going to make them smarter? Ladies, if you say to your husband, "You're really lazy, aren't you?", you think that's going to make them have initiative? Labeling only reinforces the negative. It never changes anybody. Nagging doesn't work. You speak positively to people. If you want to change yourself, your family, your mate, treat them the way you want them to become. Expect the best of them. Raise the level of expectation and watch people blossom under

affirmation and expectations. Treat them the way you want them to become, that's the secret.

Some of you are saying, I'd like to rebuild my relationship, sure, but my marriage is dead. We're still in the same house, but there's no feeling there. We've haven't had romance in years. It's dead. There's no love left.

Some of you have even heard the painful phrase, "I just don't love you anymore. The feeling is gone. I just don't love you anymore."

What do you do in that kind of situation? Do you just end the marriage? No. Do you just decide to peacefully cohabit, or not peacefully cohabit, in the same house for the rest of your life? No. What do you do?

You pray for a resurrection. Could you have those feelings you once had for your mate? Yes, exactly. If you do the right things the feelings will come back if you choose to do the loving things.

Love works if you work at it. It is easier to act your way into a feeling than to feel your way into an action. If you do that the feelings will return. The thrill can come back. God is in the miracle of resurrecting relationships business. In today's world I don't give much hope for marriages that aren't based on Jesus Christ and don't have the spiritual foundation at the center. I don't think it's possible to have the kind of love that you need to make it in today's world without Jesus Christ as the center.

Marriages that don't have a spiritual center, I don't give one chance in a hundred for twenty years. **Everything** in our society today is trying to destroy the family. Everything says Split! If you don't like it, split! Talk to 95% of secular counselors and they say, "What's best for you?" Everything in society is saying Walk away.

I'm saying, it doesn't have to be that way. Even marriages that are **DEAD** can be restored if you will act in the right way, if you'll choose to respond, if you'll be assertive the way the Bible teaches assertiveness and choose your response. Human love is not strong enough to weather the storms in life. It runs out. It goes dry. But **God's love never gives up.**

It is God's enduring love that caused him to send his own son Jesus to die for our sins. Even though we're undeserving of his love, even though we're so unlovable because of our sins, God chose to love us. He forgave our sins through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The Bible says, "without the shedding of blood, there is **no forgiveness** of sin." If you want to be forgiven of your sins, if you want to learn how to really love, receive Jesus in your heart and he will fill your heart with his love. More than that, he will give you the gift of eternal life. The Bible says he rose from the dead on the third day. He is the resurrection and life. God is in the resurrection business. He can resurrect that love in your heart.

Do you want to become a more loving person? Experience God's love in your life. That's the starting point. The choice is yours.

Let us pray...