

Neighboring
Part One: Loving God
Courage Church
Sunday February 19, 2017

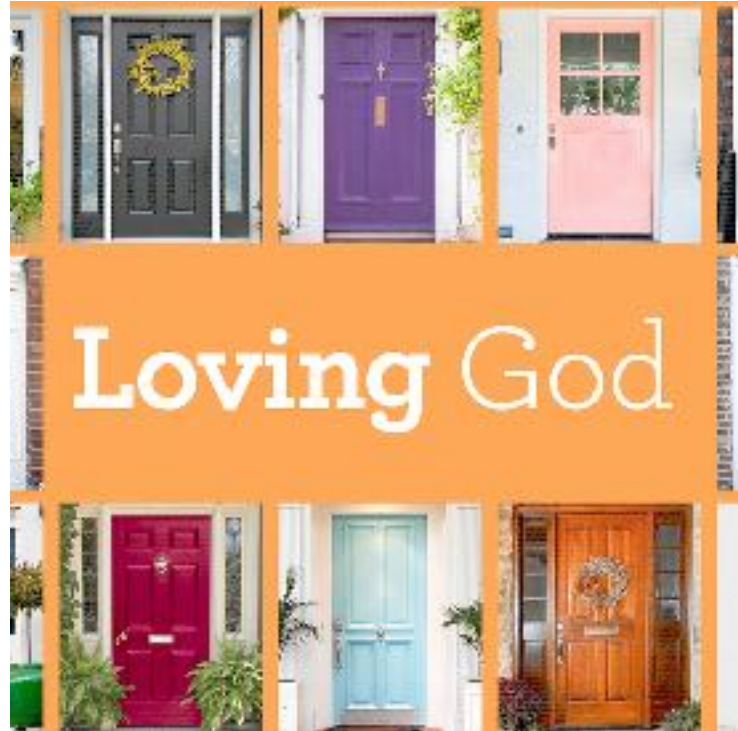
We are beginning new series today... The series is called "Neighboring."

This is actually the first time that our series here is the same series that Pastor Kevin in Lansing is doing... he and I have had several meetings about it, and have planned it all out, and of course we are each tailoring them a bit to the different churches in the different cities that we are in... but at the beginning of the year when we were talking about ways to grow our partnership with them as our "parent church"... as he was telling me about his plans for this series, it just struck a chord... I really felt like, "this is something that we could definitely adapt here in Detroit"

So, I am sure that the sermons will in the end be quite different, but they do have the same foundation... which has been fun. When I showed Austin the graphics that they created for the series, which I think are fantastic by the way... he said "we need to swap out most of those doors with doors that have bars over them... and a few others that are all boarded up... that would feel more Detroit."

But I am very excited to be able to partner on something like this!

So IF you find yourself in Lansing one of these upcoming Sunday's because you wanted to catch a Lansing Lugnuts game in the winter or something... they will be doing similar messages to us... I say that, because a lot of the visitors we get from Lansing are people here to see the Lions, or the Red Wings, or the Tigers... or they came to watch a show at



the Fox or the Fisher theater... something or another brought them to our great city, and they stop by and catch church first.

I doubt you are going to Lansing for anything like that... but if you are... you can go there and still get the message!

Now, I want to start this morning by opening up to a very famous passage... it is the moment right before Jesus gives us what is probably the most famous parable in the entire bible, the parable of the good Samaritan... next week we are going to read this entire section... but today I want us to just notice the first half of this conversation between Jesus and this lawyer.

It is found in Luke 10:25-28

“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? **How do you read it?**” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

Lets Pray.

In Matthew 22, when the Pharisees ask Jesus what the most important commandment is, He simply broke it down into two categories...

Loving God...and Loving People.

He said you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind...

and then he said: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

But in those days, even before Jesus said it, it was already understood, that there is nothing more important than love... which is proved, by the response of this lawyer to Jesus' question. The lawyer essentially told Jesus the most important thing was the Great Commandment.

Love is the currency of the Kingdom of heaven. The sum total of the entire bible can be simplified to that one word... LOVE. It is just such an important theme, and we are really going to look at it in these next five weeks.

But if you look at the response of this lawyer... and see the way that it lines up with the Great Commandment that Jesus gave us, you have to realize... even before loving my neighbor... the first thing that we have to get right is **loving God**.

So today, we are going to focus on that...

on loving God. By exploring two questions that seem so simple, but are actually extremely loaded...

1. What does it mean to “love”
2. What does it mean to “love God.”

and we will try and kind of answer these questions somewhat simultaneously.

In the Greek language there are 4 different words that are translated as love, all with very different meanings...

The Four Loves:

Eros, Storge, and Phileo (Fill-lee-a), AGAPE.

Eros: It is a love that takes but doesn't necessarily give. It is a love that says “I love you, for what you can do for me.” and obviously we all know that a love that only asks “what can I get out of this?” IS NO LOVE AT ALL.

but I want you to think about it in relation to the gospel... we always say **“you can't scare someone into accepting Jesus.”** But people do it all the time. Churches do it ALL THE TIME!

They use hell as a fear tactic to try and get someone to make a decision **that has to be made in love.**

If Jesus is just a get out of hell free card, **it is not love.**

It is “I love you because I am afraid of what will happen if I *don't* love you.”

If you love Jesus for what **He can do for you**, you have *eros*. **But ultimately, you have fear.**

You have a God who you have accepted ONLY because he can rescue you from an eternity that **most likely you blame him for you needing rescuing from anyway.**

Its totally fearful.

And so this gospel that you have accepted, though you allow it to masquerade itself as love, **ultimately is fear.**

and 1 John 4:18 tells us that there is no fear in love.

Next is the Greek word *Storge*: it is kind of the “its *only natural* to love” kind of love. Like the love of a brother to a sister or a child to a parent... or even a person to a pet. It typically means “cherishing one's kindred, especially parents or children.”

I think that if we aren't careful, when we love others and really especially when we are loving God, that our love only makes it to *Storge*. It is the obligatory love.

It is... i love you because I am supposed to love you... you are God... so I *have* to love you.

Next, we have *Phileo* (Fill-lee-a) - we could describe it as friendship, kind of... **though lots of marriages tend to be based off of this love - it is a mutual love, where both people contribute. It is a love that both gives and takes.**

So you are constantly giving, but you are giving knowing that the other person is just as eager all the time to give to you... you give KNOWING that there will be a balance in gifts...

and where most people would probably think that a strong marriage is based on *Phileo* (Fill-lee-a), in all honesty, building a marriage or even a friendship this way can actually lead to all sorts of problems.

what happens if you love someone **because of the way that you mutually take care of each other... and you serve each other out of that love knowing that the other person is serving you out of that same love... then what will happen on the day that, for whatever reason, the other person fails to serve you in that way?**

If everything in your relationship is contingent on “you scratch my back, and I scratch yours” then what happens when one day the other person forgets to scratch your back... suddenly, **you either get really upset and feel totally cheated... or you see *an out*... you see an excuse to stop scratching their back.**

but healthy relationships are NOT built on what we do so that someone else will do the same thing in return.

our love for God, just like our marriages, has to be built on A DIFFERENT KIND of love, and it is the love that is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13.

It is the Greek word *agape* and what it is, is it is a love that *just gives*. **No matter what you get back.**

It means that you value someone so much that you serve them and love them and give yourself to them whole heartedly not because of the value that the person brings to YOUR LIFE directly, but simply because they ARE VALUABLE. Not on account of what it gets you.

You have chosen this person... and that is enough.

And I explained this some to my friends David and Emily when I had the honor of officiating their wedding, I told them: if both of you approach your

marriage saying “I am ALL IN for this thing... no matter what the other person does... no matter if one of them gets lazy and stops picking up their socks and no matter if time feels like it brings distance to their relationship and someone begins to grow numb...

in most cases all that it takes is one person really really dedicated to loving the other person, for a relationship to survive and eventually get back into a place where it is thriving.

Something usually clicks in the other person... like “wow... I have been a total jerk, and yet this girl is still treating me like she loves me... and like she still wants me...” And suddenly the natural instinct becomes “I want to do that for her too!”

and the amazing thing about God, is he is constantly doing that... he is constantly loving us, blessing us, calling to us whether we respond to him or not... and something about that persistent, selfless, eternal, *agape* love, should draw you to him!

That is why it is so important to understand God’s love... because when you fully understand how deeply He loves us... if you let that sink in there is no way for it not to win your heart.

But so often we do the “robotic” Christian thing instead of taking the time to realize how deep this love actually goes... it is transformational.

***Agape* is the only way God’s love is described as manifest through Jesus. Because the act of the cross was just that... it is Jesus giving everything of himself... completely emptying himself in order to save us... knowing HE IS NOT GETTING ANYTHING FROM US! We are the ones killing him.**

agape is the word that is used when John says (1 John 4:8) God is love.

it is a love that *just gives*. **No matter what you get back.**

So to love God with agape love, it would be you LOVING Him Not so you will get anything in return, but always seeking that which He desires.

NOT what YOU DESIRE.

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Its always easier to think in terms of other people... so put yourself there...

When you serve people... why do you do it?

is it because you LOVE THEM?

Or is it because of what you can get from them... OR HOW IT MAKES YOU FEEL?

Now, turn that on God...

When you love God, do you love Him for what you can get from Him? Or for how he makes you feel?

Is it based off of an idea (or some may call it an understanding) that IF you serve Him, then He saves you?

That is not *agape*.

Most of us have "*eros*" love for God, or we maybe we even "*Phileo* (Fill-lee-a)" love for God...

but there always seems to be an underlying agenda.

Something else is driving it... something motivating it.

But what does love look like that is not driven by the hope of a result?

There is a story that we read about just after the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 (38-42) and it is one of the stories of Martha and Mary... who are the sisters of Lazarus.

and Martha welcomes Jesus into her house, and the bible tells us that the whole time that Jesus is there, Martha was DISTRACTED by trying to serve... she knows that someone significant is in her home, and so she frantically ran around the whole time trying to make everything perfect... while her sister Mary just sat at the feet of Jesus and listened as he taught.

and eventually Martha walks up to Jesus and asks him “do you not even care that my sister has left me to serve all alone?” and then Martha actually says this to Jesus... she says “TELL HER THEN TO HELP ME!” She is doing something good, something loving... but it is not *agape*... and here is why... because of the heart that was driving the action... she is setting herself apart by what she is doing... she is saying “I am doing good... and my sister is NOT” we should BOTH be doing the same thing... There should be *Phileo* (Fill-lee-a) in here... a love that gives, expecting to get... a love that gives, expecting that you aren't the only one who will be giving.

and its fascinating because Jesus in that moment, it is almost as if He feels more love from what Mary is doing... but I think that it had less to do with “it being better to sit at the feet of Jesus than it is to serve Jesus” and more about the attitude in which it was done with. The heart behind it.

and Jesus responds by telling Martha to not be anxious... and that what Mary has chosen is “the good portion,” and that will not be taken away from her..

But both of them were so special to Jesus... and this is what I find so significant about Martha and Mary...

When their brother Lazarus died, and Jesus went to visit them, Mary's tears for her brother brought Jesus to tears because of how much HE LOVED this family. (John 11) We all know Jesus was not crying because Lazarus had died, because Jesus knew perfectly well that he was going to be able to fix that... and even THIS is so significant:

When he got the news that Lazarus was sick, He said to his followers... “Our FRIEND Lazarus is sleeping, but I will go and wake him.” (John 11:11)

I am not sure how many people Jesus referred to as a FRIEND specifically by name like that... but *this family* obviously meant something to Jesus. He called them FRIENDS. And those are the types of signs that we should get when we read the bible, where we should look a little closer, and ask the question... what can I learn from them? Because they obviously did something right, they were called friends of God.

The very next chapter, (John 12) - that same family gave a dinner for Jesus, and of course, at that meal Martha was serving, but that is what Martha does... that is how she shows love... she serves. and when its done in *agape* love, it is beautiful.

And while she is serving, her sister this time anoints Jesus with extremely expensive oils.

This jar of oil that she poured completely out onto Jesus is described in the message bible (Mark 14) as being worth well over an entire year's wage. So it is extremely valuable... and the bible says that Judas, who was the treasurer of the disciples, criticizes her for doing that, but look at what the text says: (John 12:5-6)

“Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

Judas, as we read here, had already been embezzling money for himself, and was about to betray Jesus... you know that he didn't actually care about giving the money to the poor... and John just straight up tells us... he wanted to take some off of the top... so he said what he thought was the “spiritual thing” but really it was “*eros*” - it was a fabricated love... it was “what can I get out of this?”

So he criticized her... because her generosity left no room for his deceitfulness.

This jar was worth more than a years wage...

and this woman felt like the most valuable thing that she could do with it was use it to bless Jesus.

She could have paid off her house... paid off the credit cards... she could have taken a nice family vacation with her and Martha and Lazarus after going through her brother dying, and being resurrected from the dead... things like that typically take tolls on families.

or like the disciples said... she could have *actually* given that money to the poor... taken care of her neighbor. But in that moment, not long before Jesus' death, she put everything that she had into loving Jesus. And look at what Jesus said in response: (John 12:7)

Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

I love the words of Jesus that Matthew recorded in this moment... it is so powerful...

Matthew 26:10-13 -

"Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, **wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."**

Here we are today, talking about loving God, and telling that woman's story. Because there is something about giving when there is no expectation of a return. Mary didn't go there with the thought "if I pour my oil on Jesus, then my story will be told everywhere the gospel is told.."

No... Jesus said that she was preparing him for his burial. Think about that... when you do something for someone who is dying... why do you do it?

Seriously... WHAT IS THE POINT IN DOING THAT?

Love. Love is the ONLY POINT.

Because you love them.

They aren't going to be around to repay you, the whole point is, when this person does die, you want them to die knowing how much they mean to you.

That is *agape*. You are willing to give it even KNOWING that there is no way you will get anything back.

It was obvious that she loved God. It was obvious that she was willing to give up anything for Jesus because she just poured a years wage worth of oil on his head.

and this is the family that Jesus speaks of saying: "these are my friends."

A few chapters later, in John 15:12-15 Jesus says:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Jesus gives us this amazing commandment in which he calls ALL OF US his friends.

and that word LOVE that he uses... for how he loves us... and for how we should love each other... is *agape*.

When I think of what it looks like to love God, I think of four things... and there are way more than four... but I want to look at these four.

1. it looks like first being loved by God. (and responding.)

2. it looks like loving our neighbor
3. it looks like pursuing His presence
4. it looks like obedience

First it looks like being Loved by God... its a response...

our love for God is a response to being Loved by God.

Graham Cook says it like this, "it is your job to be loved by God."

That is why it is so important to spend so much time talking about how much God loves us... because his love for us is eternal... it is unconditional, it is AGAPE. And until you can wrap your mind around just how much God loves us that he was literally willing to send his only son to die on our behalf... you will never fully understand what LOVE IS.

Until you wrap your mind around the fact that no matter how much you could possibly love God, it will NEVER be more than the love that he has for you!

You are not going to out-love God!

Think about 1 John 4... we will look at a couple parts of it... verse 10 says:

"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

When John is describing *agape*, he can only point to Christ... he says, ITS NOT THAT WE LOVE GOD... yes, we do love God... BUT we will never be the ultimate example of love, that is the cross. and everything in our lives is a response to being blanketed by the love of Christ, in a way that we can never pay back.

I was talking to Jake Williams about this a few weeks ago (while we were hanging drywall in my future bedroom)... usually when I know that I am going to be teaching about a specific topic, I spend a lot of time researching it and when possible I try and ask as many people as many questions as I can... to get some real responses... to understand how this can actually

take shape in peoples lives... and I asked him... Jake... how would you answer that question... what does it mean to know God?

And he thought about it for a moment, and then he started telling me about his marriage... and about he and his wife's relationship... and he explained how he was won over by his wife's love... and seeing that love for him... that persistent, constant, unconditional love... it caused him to fall more and more in love with her...

and it is just like that with Jesus....

1 John 4:19 says this: We love, because he first loved us.

We love because his love is so incredibly extravagant that it pulls us so closely to him and it leaves us with no other appropriate response!

But watch this... both of these amazing verses about how important it is that God loved us FIRST... look at what follows them BOTH!

Verse 11: Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Verse: 20: If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Because loving God looks like "LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR."

The bible literally says that it is impossible to say "I Love God" and then at the same time hate your brother...

The bible literally says that if God so loved us... how could we not love each other?

Love means we stand by each other and we stick up for each other and we don't let our differences divide us because *agape* love is NOT trying to get anything from anyone...

guys, *agape*, like we said earlier, is the only word used to describe the way that Jesus loves us... because it is the only way that he is capable of loving... it is a truly “God kind of love” but it is also the only word used when comparing Jesus’ love, for the way that we should LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

It is the word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13 when he tells us what love is... love is patient... it is kind, it doesn’t envy or boast... it never gives up.

These are the attributes that we should develop when working out our love toward each other.

and I am not going to spend any more time on that, because essentially the rest of the entire series after today is about loving our neighbors...

The third thing I think of when I think of what it means to love God is it means pursue his presence! It means we want to be around Him. and again, it is the same as the others... Christ has given ALL that he is in order to pursue a relationship with us... That is what he did... he gave everything...

When you are that relentlessly pursued by someone who loves you that much... and you fully grasp that... it seems like it would almost be harder to respond in any other way! It should change us... we should want to be around him... we should carve out intentional time in his presence...

we should delight in the gifts of the Spirit as he speaks into our lives.

we should constantly be pursuing his presence... Think about David, who said in Psalm 63:1-2

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.

Remember, this is the man after God's own heart... and he is constantly seeking to be in the presence of God.

or think about Moses, in Exodus 33... Moses says to God (Exodus 33:13) "if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you..." Moses has this view of God and he knows that it is just SO INCREDIBLE that all he can do is want more and more of it.

and Moses does something incredible in this moment. See, Israel sinned tremendously against God, by breaking the second commandment and making this huge gold calf that they started to worship... and God was so angry about it that he was going to destroy them, but Moses fought on behalf of the people and God spared them... but God was so mad, that he said to Moses that because of all of that, God himself no longer would go with them into the promised land. Instead, he would send an angel to go with them. (Exodus 32:34)

but Moses was not content with an angel... he was not content going without God himself being with them.

So Moses tells God: (Exodus 33:15)

"If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here."

He tells God, that if God is not going to go with Israel, then Moses doesn't even want to go... the promised land is nothing without God... and he and everyone else may as well keep wandering.

Think about that... think about your life (and this is a tough question to answer honestly)... if you could get there... to that dream... but you could do it without God... would it be worth it to go?

Would it be worth it to have that career, or get that degree, or move to that city?

I mean, lets take this a step further: take salvation out of the equation entirely... say that was set... say you could get to heaven without Jesus...

you CAN'T, but for a moment, think of if you could... if you didn't need him for salvation... would you still serve him?

Would the life you can create be enough? Because to Moses it wasn't. To Moses it was "God, if you aren't going... I'll stay right here." I would rather be WITH YOU in the desert than WITHOUT YOU in the promised land.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus explains what the life looks like of someone who is transformed by the gospel and living life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Because life is not just about dying, we were put here to LIVE! Jesus gives us a few hints of what a relationship with God looks like in Matthew 6 when He describes the works of righteousness like this: WHEN YOU.

When you give... When you pray... When you fast...

Because WHEN YOU have a relationship with Jesus, you do things that draw you closer to Him. Why wouldn't you want that?

The 4th thing is **it looks like obedience.**

Even all the way back to the Ten Commandments, the second commandment says you shall not make for yourself any carved image...it goes on to say that God is a jealous God... but he shows steadfast love to the those who love him and KEEP His commandments...

God has always associated our obedience to him as love.

John 14:15 says: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

In the verse we read earlier, John 15, about being Jesus' friends, he says: You are my friends IF YOU DO WHAT I COMMAND YOU.

If you love God, then you will do what he asks... you will obey. and that means that you will learn to LOVE the WORD OF GOD... because that is where his commandments are written.

There is a false teaching that is growing more and more popular that says obedience doesn't matter... as long as you have love... as long as you love God, you are good... and truthfully, I agree... if you love God, YOU ARE GOOD.

But according to Jesus himself... you don't love God, IF you don't obey.

You may like the idea of God... you may like the idea of Jesus because the entire message is filled with grace and with hope, AND IT IS! It is the greatest story ever told... But faith without works is dead, and if your idea of God is of someone who YOU can fit into YOUR world rather than you building your life around His, and you think that obedience to God's word should not be the doctrine of your life, then at the very least you need to come to terms with the fact that you don't truly love God according to the signs that Jesus has given us for what it means to love him. God still loves you... He loves you unconditionally... with *agape* love. You have to love PEOPLE, and you HAVE TO OBEY GOD.

but God is not in the business of leaving people the way that they are! He will meet you in your messes, and because, by definition according to 1 John 4:8, God is *AGAPE*... which means that he is patient... and he is kind... and he will NEVER GIVE UP ON YOU but if in your life you are blatantly disregarding his words, then you can NOT say that you love him.

Obedience still matters.

we are called to be holy because he is Holy.

We are called to turn from unrighteousness, and turn toward him.

and it is NOT ABOUT behavior modification! So many people spend their whole lives trying to modify their behavior...

you will never truly change unless you open your heart up so that the Holy Spirit can transform you. That is the gospel. The gospel is the realization that without the blood of Jesus, you are dead in your sins and without hope... but with Jesus, and the help of the Holy Spirit, you can actually get to a place in your life when you truly are a new creation... the old desires

begin to pass away because you actually want God to do something new in you.

Paul tells us (Romans 8:12-13) that we are not in debt to our flesh so we can keep living in our flesh... no... only by the SPIRIT coming alive in your heart will you be able to KILL THE FLESH, and live in freedom...

Romans 8:15

you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

As a Father, it is easy for me to associate the love that I have for my children to GODS LOVE FOR US... and even with that, Jesus says in the sermon on the mount that if “you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

but to some extent, I do understand a Father’s unconditional love for his children... But if you were to ask me if I could explain the way that my kids love me... as their Father... that would be a little harder for me to put into words.

I know how much I love my Dad... I know how much I love my parents... because I know how much they love me... how much they gave up for me... how much they sacrificed so that I could have a great life... and my love for them flows out of that... out of spending my entire life always feeling loved, and never feeling unwanted...

But what I have been trying to do lately, is think about what things MY KIDS do for ME that make me feel loved...

Because I want God to know how much I love him... and I understand his love for me, his child, because I understand how much i love my kids...

but the times that I feel like my kids love me are the times that they want to hear me... they want to listen to me... they want to snuggle up while I read them a story...

The times that I feel like my kids love me, are the times when I ask them to do something, and they do it... I feel loved in those moments... because they don't ALWAYS want to do the same things that I ask them to do... but when they accept it and they do it, I feel loved.

Honestly... I feel love when my kids invite other kids into our house... and when they play and they get along and not fight. Because we are trying to teach our kids what it means to be hospitable... what it means to put others before themselves... and we don't always get it right...

but when we do, I am a proud Father... who knows that my kids are actually listening to me.

Those may not be the same ways that my kids would describe their love for me... but those are the things that show me that they care...

God is looking for a relationship with you... one built on trust... one built on obedience... and hear this, more than anything... Nothing shows God that you love him in a greater way... than you demonstrating the love that he has already shown you, to someone else... Because when you show someone else what God's love has done in your life... it will start to do something in theirs...

and there is nothing closer to the heart of the Father, than people.

And for the rest of this series, that is what we are going to look at... People. Who are we supposed to love? and How are we supposed to love them?

And the most simple answer to that incredibly complicated question is this:

We love, because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)