

MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

Choose Love, Let God Change Their Heart!

John 15:12; Matthew 22:37-40; John 8:3-11; John 4:4-26

Definition: We live in a time where speaking up against anything can get you labeled as judgmental, intolerant, and hateful. Yet the Bible has some very strong words against actions that are becoming normalized. As Christians we sometimes feel pressure to take a stand and speak up but how do we do that in a loving way? To follow the example of Christ means our primary calling is to love and serve others. We must do so with an active love that prayerfully will lead people towards living Christ-like lives. We must have faith that God will change hearts in response to the initiative of love.

Segment Questions:

- Jesus spoke of love in many of his public and private statements. Yet, in the temple, he seems to act out of anger as he turns over tables and rebukes the sellers. How do we balance “taking a stand” versus “This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.” John 15:12.
- When is the appropriate time to confront or rebuke someone as opposed to accepting and loving them “as yourself”? Is there a different standard or approach with your Christian brothers and sisters than with people of the world?
- When Jesus said, “*This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you*” (John 15:12), He didn’t mean we can pick and choose who to love or at what time we love them. What would happen if we went out of our way to befriend someone we didn’t like or who had done something to hurt us?
- How did Jesus show love to the woman brought before him? Be specific and think through his interactions with her.
- How is love an action to introduce others to Christ?

Action Questions:

- What would happen if we suddenly didn’t allow our prejudices to influence our perspective? Or if we didn’t allow religion to get in the way of our relationships?
- Think of a time in your life where you felt you “chose love and let God be the one to change their heart” in a relationship. Can you share how you managed the relationship and the blessing that came from it? If you can’t think of an example, how might you change your approach to engaging the world?
- How might this axiom change how you approach people who hold different values or views than yours?

I first started working on this lesson while we were in the midst of what has been called one of the most divisive, name-calling and accusing elections our country has seen. It seems that every day brought an onslaught of accusations. Both campaigns worked overtime to see what kind of “sins from the past” they could surface and use against their opponent. The church found itself right in the middle of it all. Sides were taken and passionate statements were often made with Scripture used to back up their position.

It got me thinking and wondering about how would Jesus campaign if He were running. Would He start with calling out the sins of His opponent? We clearly have examples where Jesus took a stand – sometimes in pretty dramatic fashion. Put yourself in the place of being one of the money-changers in the temple. You’re just there minding your own business when all of a sudden Jesus shows up and starts releasing the doves and flipping your tables over as He yells, “My Temple will be called a house of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves!” That’s pretty bold and in your face. (Matthew 21:12-13)

Yet then look at the command He gives in John 15:12. *This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.*

Does that mean that acting in love is equated with confronting people about their sins as Jesus did in the temple? That doesn’t seem to jive with Jesus’ words which are commonly called the *Golden Rule* which reads, “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.*” (Matthew 22:37-40)

So what’s the deal? Is our view of love wrong? Is our calling to be more confrontational like Jesus was in the temple? Or am I to love my neighbor as myself? I think some fantastic insight can be gained from seeing how Jesus handled this situation as recorded in John 8:3-11.

As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”

They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

“No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

I think this passage shows us a clear way to relieve the tension between caring and confronting. Love isn’t a warm fuzzy feeling of acceptance; it is an action to introduce others to Christ. It is acknowledging that His love has no exclusions and neither should ours! We must have faith that God will change people’s hearts without us having to publically rebuke their sins. God calls us to care, comfort and call. It doesn’t mean we endorse or encourage sin. There may be times we need to speak up. But we must always ask ourselves if we are doing as “*loving in the same way Jesus loved us.*”

We should choose love and let God be the one to change their heart.