

For Me to Live is Christ – in My Daily Relationships

What Does Love Look Like Now?

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:14-16 For Christ's love compels us...he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him...so from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

You know them. They are the ones who make your life miserable. Without them life would go smoother. They are the people who complain and argue. They are the ones who don't hold up their part of the task. They are the bullies. They are the ones who keep you from getting your tasks done. What started out a promising life is challenged by relationship breakdowns in marriage, disrespectful behavior in kids, an uncaring boss, and troublesome neighbors. Life would sure be easier without them, wouldn't it? Last week we approached life, with this motto: "Let this task be lived for you, Jesus." Sometimes it seems like we could live our task for Christ better if we were away from all those people distracting us or dragging us down. But have you considered – they may be your task for Christ. Sometimes we can get so busy with our tasks that we push past another part of our calling – people.

This is a concept that the apostle Paul learned the hard way and he wants to use his experience to teach us how to fulfill our calling to other people. He helps us to answer the question, **"What does love look like now, Jesus?"**

Paul lived that loftier view of life and so appreciated it because he had seen the other side of the coin. He had once been a vindictive person and like a terrorist felt his cause was more important than individual people – in fact they were the target of his anger. He felt that his task was to be the judge and jury over others. He thought his calling was to get rid of people who threatened his way of life...people later labeled "Christians." Think what it would have been like if God acted in that way toward us. Would he not have just crushed people like Paul? Would he not have eliminated those who burdened him with their sins and their troubles, with their hatred and abuse? Would he not have destroyed those who messed up his perfect work? Would he not have rejected the whole lot of us for our disrespectful behavior toward him? Would he not have every right to forget about us as we forget about him? But God cares. He is love – looking at us in spite of what we have done and finding ways to help us in our greatest need. God had his loving way with Paul. After knocking him off his horse he convicted him of working against God, not for God – of not following God's cause, but persecuting Christ with his attitude and actions. And you and I are frequently as self-centered and self-absorbed as Paul was. We are driven by our cause thinking it is what makes our life meaningful, when in reality it puts us on the same road to hell that Paul was on.

Then Jesus unfolded this great plan for Paul – a plan that at its center put Jesus on the cross to die for murderers like Paul, a plan that set the stage for Paul to come face to face with the Jesus he had been persecuting with his life, a plan that led him to believe in that Jesus, a plan that turned Paul's life right around. You can hardly imagine what a difference that made. This former opponent of Jesus now couldn't learn enough about him. "I want to know more," were his words. God does that to you too. He comes with his power in his Word to bring you to your knees in repentance too and lifts you up to heights you could never have imagined before.

What does love look like now? When love is understood in Christ, it transforms a person. *“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died”* (5:14). You see, Jesus died and rose again to free us from the prison of sin and guilt – but not so we could run free to live like the rest of the world again – satisfying the cravings and lusts that drive us. That would be jumping right back into slavery again – slavery to our sinful nature, slavery to our childhood experiences, slavery to our culture’s faults, slaves to those who study our sinful weaknesses and capitalize on them. It takes a law blow from the Holy Spirit to convict us of the slavery of our own sinful condition and a clear understanding of the gospel to unveil for us the real Jesus where we find real life and true fulfillment. Paul now understood that this Jesus went the full extent of love – giving up life itself – not only for Paul, but for all the people Paul would meet in his everyday life. *“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again”* (5:15). Paul’s life wasn’t about himself. It was about Jesus. He wasn’t living it for Paul. He was living it for Jesus. It wasn’t about what Paul wanted; it was about doing what Jesus intended with his life.

It changed his daily relationships. *“From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view, Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer”* (5:16). Why did Paul care differently about people now? Christ’s love compelled him... it overwhelmed him and captured his whole being and absorbed him in Christ. People looked different to him now. This former murderer now had a passion to share Jesus’ love with anyone God put in front of him. No longer did he favor political or economic status: high standing vs. low, slave vs. free – They were individuals important to him because they are important to Jesus. No longer did he favor age distinctions: child vs. adult. No longer did he categorize ethnic differences: Jew vs. Gentile. Those labels mean nothing to a person’s worth before God. They are all ones for whom Christ died and rose and wants to come to a knowledge of the truth. They are ones God put in Paul’s.

Are you getting this so far? For me to live is Christ - in my relationships. We don’t stay here in the place all week. We go out into the world, among people. We come here to get the energy and encouragement to carry this calling into our daily relationships. Those callings will look different for each of you. He makes each one of you unique, with tremendous significance to his purposes. Like a potter forming the clay, God shapes you, your personality, gifts, interests, likes, experiences for his outstanding purposes. What does that look like? That is a discovery you need to continue to make. We find purpose when we reflect his love in the place in life he has put us. You may be at this moment called to be a father, a husband, a factory foreman, a neighbor, a councilman. You may be a mother, a human resource director, a daughter and a director of the Vacation Bible School. You may be a child, a student, a brother, a musician, and a friend. All these are callings in which we live – not for yourselves – but for the one who has made life worthwhile for you too – compelling you by his love.

In our relationships we become, as Luther said, “the masks God wears” to show his love to others without others seeing who’s really behind it. Just think how he did that for you. God put into your world people who knew what love had to be for you, even if you didn’t recognize it. They are the ones who noticed your needs and worked hard to supply them. They are the ones who were there when you skinned your knee, when someone crushed your feelings or when you needed a job. They are the ones who hugged you and didn’t hold your sins against you. They were the ones God sent to make sure you felt his love.

Now it's your turn. In your home, ask, "**What does love look like now?**" Look around you and say, **Who needs me here?** Sometimes it may be mom needing a hand with the groceries, or staying up late with a sick child, working hard to put children through school, skipping a game to spend needed time with your wife, saying words of encouragement to your husband who has become discouraged. Jesus is calling you in the cries of your baby or in the weariness of your spouse. Those callings are more often carried out in the routine rather than in the grand and spectacular. And in case you look down on those callings don't forget how God honors the home with the terms he uses to describe his relationship with us. He describes himself as Father to us his children. And fathers, the more you understand your heavenly Father, the more you will understand how to carry out that calling in your life. God also often says he is the Father to the fatherless (Ps 68:5)– which should encourage us to find a way to be wholesome father figures to that child who grows up without a father's care. At other times God compares his love to us like the love of a mother – sanctifying the high honor he places in the high calling of motherhood. And Christ describes his relationship to us, his Church, as the relationship of bridegroom and bride. Husbands and wives, the more you understand that picture, the more you will live a sanctified reflection of that in your life as husband and wife – making that calling even more enjoyable.

And at work – what relationships does he put before you to demonstrate his love? In everyone you see ask, "**What does love look like now? Who needs me here?**" It might be the one for whom you are using your skills in order to supply what they lack – as a plumber, farmer, grocer, programmer, or foreman. "**What does love look like now?**" might mean slowing down what you are doing for a moment to pay attention to someone who needs it – letting Christ be seen through your actions toward them – your empathetic listening, your helping, your sharing Jesus.

And in your community or neighborhood – **What does love look like now? Who needs me here?** The opportunity to show my love for God is hidden in my neighbor's need. And who is my neighbor? The story of the Good Samaritan defines it as the one who needs me right now. Your simple actions of compassion are a big deal to God. The simple action of giving water to a child may seem like a small thing, but Jesus says, "It means something to me."

Love isn't always easy. It was back in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve understood how to perfectly love and honor each other. But as soon as they let selfishness creep in, the result was tension in relationships with God (fear, and rebellion) and with each other (blame and anger). Fulfilling our calling in our relationships is not without struggle that sparks our sinful responses. Think of the sleepless nights of new parent. Think of the difficult times in childrearing when children (and parents) can be on an emotional rollercoaster. Church is not always peace and harmony. Sometimes arguments over secondary things take our focus off the primary unity we share in the gospel. On this side of heaven there is no perfection. But Jesus has removed the condemnation and the curse and sets me on the path to heaven. The Holy Spirit sets me free not to be tangled up thinking again about myself with selfishness, self-pity and all the insecurities that come from comparing myself with others – I'm free to be motivated by the genuine love of God to serve my neighbor – to fulfill the purpose for which I was created – to be good for something and for someone all because God was all the goodness I need for myself. (Luther, AE 21:35) You see, my calling is not a "feeling" I'm following – it is accepting the opportunities God places us in where we can positively affect others.

Life's tasks, events and relationships are the scaffolding for God purposes – building you to be what he called you to be. The more you are compelled by Christ's love – captured in his

death and raised up in his resurrection and ascension – the more we become “little Christ’s,” as Luther said, to the people in our daily world. Let that love of Christ draw you to put yourself aside and for you – to live for Christ. Go see the grand and glorious purpose God has for you at home, office, neighborhood with that question echoing in your head. – **What does love look like now? Who needs me here?** – How can I help them to see Christ in me and experience Christ through me? That is your high and privileged calling.

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