

LIFEWORSHIP: LOVING GOD WITH YOUR LIFE
Colossians 3:12-14

You will see it all over the place on Valentine's Day. People exchanging cards, candy, flowers, gifts. People telling one another, "I love you!" It's kind of nice. We do this for a lot of people: moms & dads, kids, friends, brothers and sisters. But it's different when it is for one special person we love – a husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend – someone with whom you are "in" love.

You might get them a gift of something you know they will like and appreciate. You take care to buy a card that helps express how you really feel. When you are "in" love with someone, you want to be around them all the time. You love them, and you like them. You like doing things together, experiencing things together. If you are watching a beautiful sunset by yourself, all you can think about is how you wish your love could be there to experience it with you. If you are apart from that person, you can hardly wait to see them again. If you have been apart for any length of time, that reunion is glorious – hugs and kisses and "I missed you!" You'll see those scenes played over and over again at the airport, as someone waits for their love to come into view. When they finally exit the gates they run to embrace each other.

Are you "in" love with Jesus Christ? He is in love with you. That may sound crazy to some people. But when you love Jesus, or anyone for that matter, it's hard to explain. And if you are in love with Jesus, how do you show that love for Him when you come to worship? How does your love for Christ affect you when you leave this place?

Today we are finishing the series, "Experiencing God in Worship." This last message is LifeWorship: Loving God with Your Life. These past few weeks we have been talking about worship as a feast where we come to experience God with all of our senses. – and that we truly worship as we love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This last message puts it all together. (When you have an enchilada for a meal, you don't say you are about to eat cheese, chicken, tortilla and beans. You say you are going to eat an enchilada.) So when we come to worship God, Jesus is saying that it is more than with the different, individual parts of our heart, mind, soul and strength. What Jesus means is that we love Him with all that we are, all of our life.

So how do we do that? Worship has an ebb & flow like the tides of the sea. We come in and spend time in worship of the One we love; then we go out into the world to proclaim and live out that love; then we return again. In a love relationship, when we are with the one we love, something changes inside of us – heart, mind, soul and strength that doesn't disappear once we leave their presence. Our behavior changes. We aren't interested in someone else to love. We do things that we think are pleasing to our loved one, something we know they would like. We would never think of betraying them – the idea of it horrifies us. You don't leave their presence and then bad mouth them to your friends. Loving with our life, means a change in our behavior even when we are apart.

Our life is not confined to the hour or so we spend in worship. You don't truly love someone for an hour, then forget about them when you leave the house. Love is a way of

life. It changes you and your attitude. If you have ever tried to talk to someone who is in love, they are a little annoying. They just want to talk about the one they love. They think about them all the time. They treat other people nicer. They are easier to get along with. In worship, we all might come here for different reasons, but even if we have different reasons for coming here, what all of us would like most is to experience God in worship, be changed by the love of God and leave changed.

Colossians 3:14-17 talks about how we are changed:

¹⁴And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. ¹⁶Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! ¹⁷Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

We put on good and holy characteristics to honor God, the One we love. But the most important quality is love. We express that love when all that we do in our life honors God. We worship any time we experience some blessing from Him. We whisper (or shout) a silent word of thanks or praise. We start to sing a hymn or praise song. We rejoice always and pray without ceasing as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-16: ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Prayer is like an ongoing conversation we hold with God in our mind. Praise is the first response we have when we experience something beautiful or something good.

But what happens in any love relationship when some of that passion dies down? Some people make the mistake of thinking they must not love the other person anymore. Some people give up working on their relationship, because relationships take work to grow. Something important to know is that love goes through seasons – just like the seasons of the year. In the tough seasons, you weather the storms, you work at your relationship and spring will come again. I believe the same goes for our relationship with Christ. Sometimes we have desert seasons, when our spiritual life is dry. Sometimes we have what some call, the dark night of the soul, where we can experience such a sense of the absence of God, we fall into despair. Other times we are bored with the relationship, because we have used Jesus up and gotten all we think we can get out of Him. Sometimes we make terrible mistakes, we sin against the one we love most, and we yearn for the relationship to be reconciled again.

The Gospel of John chapter 21, tells how Jesus appeared to His disciples after Easter Sunday. He has the angels tell them, “Go to Galilee, there you will see Him.” So the disciples go back to Peter’s house, at Capernaum, which was their headquarters. Not much is happening, so Peter and others, who were fisherman decided to go out and try their luck fishing. All night, they catch nothing. Then someone from the shore tells them to throw their nets on the right side of the boat, and they catch so many fish they can barely haul them in. When John tells Peter that it’s Jesus, Peter jumps in the water and

swims to shore to see Jesus again. Wouldn't you? Your friend and Master, who you love, was put through torture and executed, and now He is alive and well! You would run the longest distance, swim the deepest ocean, climb the highest mountain to get to Him. Peter jumps in and swims to shore just to be with Jesus again.

Jesus has already cooked breakfast for his friends. The disciples eat and struggle with what to say – especially Simon Peter. The last time he saw Jesus alive before the cross, Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times. Breakfast had to be a little awkward. What do you say to someone you love after betraying them? After breakfast, Jesus takes the initiative and asks Peter three times – “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter is upset that Jesus has to ask him this, and each time, he responds, “Yes, Master, you know I love you!” And each time Jesus gives Peter a way Peter can prove his love – “Then feed my sheep.” During our study last Wednesday, Cliff Kelley pointed out the most significant way Peter and all of us can express our love to Jesus, comes after these questions, when Jesus says, “Follow Me!”

So what does that mean for us, if we are to worship God without ceasing, to love God with your life, and follow Jesus? LifeWorship does not mean being so heavenly minded, you are no earthly good. Christians have often been criticized for that, sometimes rightfully so. But if loving Jesus means following Him, we go where Jesus would go, and do what Jesus would do. And to our amazement, we find Him in those places – in the most unlikely of places and in the most unlikely of circumstances.

This week I opened an e- newsletter from Integrity music that happened to have an article written by Laura MacCorkle called, “14 Ways to Worship with Your Life.” She lists things like, “Love the unlovely,” “Give God your firstfruits,” “Show your Muscle: Help the Weak,” “Give Up the Gossip.” You can get a copy of the article with all 14 ways at the end of the service. How will you love God with your life? Worship becomes a way of life, a lifestyle.

In the ebb and flow of worship, we join together with others who love Jesus Christ where we express our love for Him in worship, then we go out to minister to the least of these, and we discover Him there. The Christian band, Leeland, named after the lead singer, has a song, “Follow You,” that says, “I'll follow you into the homes of the broken; follow you into the world; meet the needs of the poor and needy; Follow you into the world. I give all myself; I give all myself to you.” Heart, mind, soul and strength – I'll give my whole life to you.

What are you taking with you from worship today? What has changed in you due to the love of Jesus Christ? How will you live differently after spending time with the one you love? Where will you go to find Him again?