

## Group Resource

# Sermon Notes – Sunday, February 23, 2014

## Love, Sex + Godly Relationships

**Message:** Searching for Real Love

**Scripture:** 1 John 4:16

- I. Many of our songs and entertainment focus on the notion that we can find “real love.” In 1992, Mary J. Blige penned a song that recounted her search for “real love.” But was what she was searching for real love or an artificial love masquerading as real love?

## II. What is real love?

- a. Most of us have a unique definition of love that is based upon our previous experiences of how we were loved. We live by the notion that love is not something that you can define, but something that you just know and feel. Since we constantly judge others based upon how we define what love feels like, we owe it to ourselves to examine how we define real love so that we are not judging by the wrong standard.
- b. Love as a mirror. Our heart is like a mirror that provides a model for how we live out our lives. We are constantly bombarded with thoughts, ideas or images that will influence what we mimic in our own lives.
  - i. When it comes to love, we try to mimic love based upon how we see others expressing love towards us and others. The love we hear about in popular songs is often portrayed as a feeling—usually involving unfulfilled desire. The love that we see modeled on popular television is often focused on selfish love.
  - ii. Unfortunately, in a fallen world, artificial expressions of love easily masquerade as real, perfect love. We can even lower our standards of what we identify as real, perfect love based upon our experiences. Ultimately, we must choose to model our lives on a higher expression of love.
- c. Both agnostics and Christians believe that the highest virtue that exists is to love. But, these groups often define love very differently. What then is real love according to God’s perspective?
  - i. Is love just a feeling? If we love someone, do we always give them what they want? Is love an involuntary emotion or intoxicating sensation?
  - ii. The most profound understanding of love comes from the author of love, God, himself. In the Book of 1 John 4:16 – the Bible declares, “GOD IS LOVE.” Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. Love is a choice that we must submit ourselves to make.
  - iii. Instead of trying to live according to the imperfect love that we see all around us, we must determine to reflect the perfect love of God.
  - iv. <sup>1 COR 13:4-7</sup> *Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.<sup>6</sup> It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.<sup>7</sup> Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*
  - v. **“Perfect Love is the unselfish and benevolent commitment to seek and sacrificially pursue the best interests of another, regardless of how we feel towards them”** (Pastor Joseph)
  - vi. Real, perfect love is ... **Unselfish**
    1. That means if I truly love someone, I’m not solely concerned with having my desires fulfilled, but seeking the best for whoever is the object of my love

vii. Real, perfect love is ... **Benevolent**

1. Love is a purposeful act of self-giving. When we live by love, we need to build our capacity to benevolently give of ourselves to others.
2. We can try to build our capacity to give to others based on several fleeting foundations.
3. Some of us try to expand our capacity to give to others by loving ourselves more. We tell ourselves that we are important in an attempt to feel loved. However, we will always feel like others are asking for more love than we can give to ourselves. Others expect the people in their life to be responsible for filling up their capacity of love.
4. In reality, the only way that we can have the capacity to love others and to receive love is to FIRST experience the overwhelming love of God in our own lives. God's love is the key to loving others and receiving love.

viii. Real, perfect love considers the ... **Best interest of another**

1. Artificial love may make someone feel good in the moment, but it doesn't take into consideration what is in another's best interest. Love that solely considers one's own needs is selfish love. Real, perfect love esteems others above ourselves.

ix. Real, perfect love ... **Sacrificially pursues**

1. Desiring what is in the best interest of someone else requires us to sacrificially give of ourselves to bring that desire to pass. Sacrificial giving is not enablement. Sometimes sacrificially giving is saying NO out of love.

- d. We have to ask ourselves, "*Am I missing any dimensions of real, perfect love in how I seek after and understand love?*"

## II. Does it matter whether we distinguish between real, perfect love or artificial love?

- a. Love characterizes how two people relate to another. The quality of our relationships is directly related to a deliberate daily choice to walk in love.
- b. Ultimately, God created us with an innate need to be loved and to share that love with others.
- c. In Jeremiah 31:3, the prophets reminds the children of Israel that "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.'"
- d. God expects us to give the same quality of love to others as we have received from Him.
  - i. <sup>1 John 4:11</sup> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
  - ii. <sup>1 JOHN 4:17-19</sup> And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. <sup>18</sup> Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. <sup>19</sup> We love each other because he loved us first.

## III. How do we know that we are walking in real love?

- a. We have to evaluate our standard of measure. John says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." (1 John 3:16)
- b. Receiving God's love forces us to reevaluate what we consider to be real, perfect love. Judging love simply by feelings, is like judging the quality of a car based on whether or not it has wheels. Wheels are an essential part of a car, but they do not dictate the operability of the car. In the same way, feelings are a part of experiencing love, but they are not the ultimate differentiation of whether we are loved.
- c. We have to determine to spend time in the mirror allowing the love that God shows us to reflect in how we love others.

Group Resource

## Let's Talk Notes – Sunday, February 23, 2014

### Love, Sex + Godly Relationships

Message: Searching for Real Love

Scripture: 1 John 4:16

- 1) Find the lyrics to a love song that has made an impact on you or that is one of your favorites. As a group, evaluate whether the lyrics of the song exemplify a real, perfect love or an artificial feeling of love.
- 2) As you reflect back on last weekend's sermon, what one principle or insight stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful or difficult to grasp? Were you challenged in any area of your personal walk with God?
- 3) What are some songs, images, or influences that have formed your definition of love?
- 4) Counterfeit love is often one-dimensional, while real, perfect love is multi-dimensional. How does Pastor Joseph's definition of love challenge your previous definition of love. How would you define counterfeit/artificial love?
- 5) How does this statement impact you? 'Love is a purposeful act of self-giving'? Pastor Joseph noted that in order to live by love, you need to build your capacity to benevolently give of yourself to others. Have you ever unfairly expected the people in your life to be responsible for filling up your capacity to love? How does receiving God's love change the way that you desire to receive love from others?
- 6) If you feel loved by others, does it make a difference whether you are receiving real, perfect love or artificial love?
- 7) How can you spend time in the mirror allowing the love that God shows you to reflect in how you love others? What negative images of love do you need to tear down as your standard of measure? Pray that the Lord would reveal to you the reality of His love.