

Deep Change (Week 4) - The Art of Loving
Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Bullet Points or Less

1. When have you felt loved well in your life? When have you loved others well? These questions are where we started on Sunday. These two questions are linked and interdependent: Linda Bloom, a leading American expert on the psychology of relationships writes, "(1) Receiving and giving love are two halves of the whole that represents our need for love... (2) This

belief that we should be able to give love even if we never receive it ourselves is a fallacy. It is in receiving love that our capacity for reciprocating is activated. Until we have that experience, we are unable to give love to others...(3) There can be shame in admitting we need more love than we are getting. We may fear that it makes us a needy person."

2. It's likely that none of us need to be convinced that love stands at the very center of the Christian faith. So instead of reiterating this yet again, we used our time on Sunday trying to get better acquainted with the "how" of love.

3. To do that, we tapped into one of the most magisterial and influential treatises on love of the last 100 years, "The Art of Love" by social psychologist Eric Fromm, written in 1956.

4. Fromm draws at least three basic conclusions about loving well. First, we need to recognize that our culture doesn't prioritize love. Here's how he says that: "Here lies the answer to the question of why people in our culture try so rarely to learn the art of love: in spite of our deep-seated cravings for love, almost everything else is considered to be more important than love, like success, prestige, money, power, work, and even leisure. Almost all our energy is used for learning how to achieve these many aims, and almost none is used to learn the art of loving."

5. Second, there is nothing better or more liberating in life than the experience of love. Again, his words: "If two people who have been strangers, as all of us are, suddenly let the wall between them break down and feel close, feel sublimely connected, this moment of oneness is one of the most exhilarating, most exciting experiences of life. It is all the more wonderful and miraculous for persons who have been shut off, isolated, and without love," and "The awareness of aloneness and separateness...is an unbearable prison. A human being would become insane could he not liberate himself from this prison and reach out, and unite himself in some form or other with someone else."



6. Third, and an insight from which his book's title is derived, love is a skill that you develop with practice. Once more, here's how he puts that: "The first step is to take is to become aware that love is an art, just as loving is an art. If we want to learn how to love we must proceed in the same way we have to proceed if we want to learn any other art, say, music, painting, or carpentry."

7. There are four primary and practical components of loving well, at which we can get better with sustained effort: caring for and nurturing others emotionally, responding willingly and voluntarily to the needs of those around us, knowing ourselves and the other person clearly and deeply, and respecting the other person enough to let them grow and unfold in a way that's best for them, not you. (These will be described more below in the next section.)

8. Fromm concludes near the end of his book that as we practice these four skills over and over, we will begin to be changed fundamentally. As he writes, "Love is not primarily contextual, confined to particular relationships with particular persons. Rather, it is an attitude, an orientation of character to the world as a whole." Christian psychologist David Benner would say it this way: as we live in love year after year, slowly we become love. We are able to take this posture of and commitment to love into every situation and our every interaction with every person.

The Art of Loving This Week

This is one week where the personal application of the sermon's contents should be pretty straightforward. Let's spend a week trying to get a little better at those four key skills in loving well:

1. Take some stock of your life: how well are you loving right now, and how much do you feel loved? Are you living with a "love deficit"? Remember what Linda Bloom said - we are able to give love only as much as we are willing to receive it from others. So pray this week that you'd be open to both receiving and giving love.

2. How can you nurture emotionally those around you? How can you show active concern?:
- Find a way to express or communicate a positive, encouraging, or affirming emotion to someone else You can do this person to person, in writing, you name it. The key is make this about feeling, not merely an idea: share your positive emotion about someone to make their own emotions more positive.

3. Be ready to respond willingly and voluntarily to someone's need:

- How can you live a little slower and a little less stressed so that you can create margins from which you can respond in love to others?
- Pray to live awake and aware each morning, so that you will notice someone's need when it surfaces.
- Assume that you are God's emissary to meet every need you notice, even if it is just the need for a kind word or encouragement.
- Allow yourself to need too, which then will allow you to let others love you in response to that need.

4. Know the other person deeply and respect them enough to let them grow and develop in the way that's best for them, not you

- Make it a point to get to know someone better this week. Dive into their story, let them share, don't judge. Give them the great privilege of being known.
- To a safe, trustworthy person, allow yourself to be known.
- Endeavor to interact with everyone as if they are just as "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139.14-15) as you are, as fully human and as worthy of respect as you are.
- Encourage someone you know about how they're growing or developing, maybe most especially if they're growing in a way that's different from you.

5. How can we help you connect with others in this kind of deeper, more meaningful way at KirkWood? Would a gathering or group that focused only on this kind of deep connecting interest you?

6. A prayer idea for the week...pray through 1 Corinthians 13.4-8a (click [here](#)) daily or a couple of times a day. Ask God to help you become like this, pray it for others you know.