

Gentle Nursing, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 24081026
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 and Matthew 22:34-46
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When you have something as precious as love, you can't be quiet about it! Do you remember what your first real love was like? Your heart pounded. You didn't care about studying or eating or sleeping. You were ready to do most anything in order to secure your lover's attention. You can't be quiet when you have love.

Jesus was a lover. He had love and couldn't be quiet. His heart pounded and he didn't care about much other than talking about and living love. Jesus was not quiet about love: God's love for him or his love for others. He was such a lover that he gave up his life. Do you know that kind of love— love where you are ready to give up your life for your beloved? God loves us with that much love.

The word "love" is too often misused. "I *love* to go shopping."

"He beats me, but I love him too much to leave him."

We have misconceptions about love. That is why relationships can become manipulative and destructive, sucking the life out of another, rather than feeding the other with love.

Misconceptions of love can lead to abusive relationships.

Jesus taught us about love. He said all of the Old Testament law was summed up in the words, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"¹ That is a heart-pounding, telephone-talking, give-up-everything-else kind of love. That is the gospel.

Our faith is summed up in three loves: God, others, and self. Love is: unmotivated, unmanipulated, unconditional, unlimited. Love is unmotivated. It is pure and from the heart without anyone else making you love. Love is unmanipulated. It does not try to mold the beloved into what the lover wants the beloved to be. Love is unconditional. It does not say, "I will love you if only you will... whatever." Love is unlimited. It does not end when the beloved becomes disabled, or when someone better-looking comes along.

Somewhere along the way, that teenaged kind of love has to transform and mature into a covenantal love. It becomes a contract between two or more parties, and I don't mean here a pre-nuptial agreement. In covenantal love, no longer does each party have to primp and prepare, worried that the other might not like them. Now each is free to be him or herself, knowing that in covenant love, the other will always be there. Now the primping and preparing is done, not to maintain the interest of the other, but as a gift to the other.

Love is faithful. It remains with the other through thick and thin. It tries to work through difficulties. In summing up the law, which was a covenant between God and the people Israel, Jesus was clear that we are to love God, love others, and love ourselves. They all happen at once. You cannot love one without loving the other two. A man who does not love himself cannot love a woman with unmotivated unconditional love, but instead, will manipulate that woman in order to serve his own needs. A woman who does not love others cannot love herself, but will rather so indulge herself as to drive others away and end up in extreme isolation. Men and women who do not love God will be unable to put themselves into proper human perspective. We certainly

¹Matthew 22:38-39

cannot love God if we do not love other people. Jesus said, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”²

God has created us to be wonderful loving beings: loving our creator, loving others, and loving ourselves. The question is, will God find us faithful? Will those who come behind us find us faithful?

The earliest written words in the New Testament were those in Paul’s first letter to the church at Thessalonica, a town in present day Greece, the section called Macedonia. Paul reminded the church members about how he came and told them the good news about Jesus Christ. In the process, Paul tells us a little more about what love is. He said he could have come to them in any of four negative ways. He said, “we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, [nor did we] make demands, [although we could have.]”³

Instead, Paul came “gently,” he said, “like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.”⁴ We know that nursing is a caring profession, and we have some nurses here. We know how gentle and loving an act is nursing a baby: feeding a helpless infant. Now, imagine all of that care being focused on one’s own child! That is how Paul came into that town of Thessalonica, telling the people about the good news of Jesus.

Here’s what love is: it is nursing a child. It is literally giving the breast milk of life and nourishment to another. Love is giving and it is nurturing.

Paul said, “we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading.”⁵ “So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.”⁶

Love is putting your own life on the line for the beloved. Billy Joel sang a song, “And So It Goes.”⁷ It contains the words, “You can have this heart to break.” In other words, I love you, and I open myself up to you. I give my heart to you for safekeeping. You may break my heart, but I entrust it to you. One who loves is vulnerable. Jesus was vulnerable. This kind of love is what the Christian faith is all about. God’s love for us, our love for God, our love for one another, and for the world around us.

Paul says that we proclaim the good news of God’s love to others gently. One way we proclaim good news is by what we give to support the church. Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. There are many who do not give at all to support the work of the church. It’s like public radio. Each year about this time, WUNC and others have fund raisers. They point out that many listen to public radio without supporting it. Those listeners depend upon others to carry their weight. When it comes to church, when it comes to proclaiming your love for God, do not depend upon others. Future generations depend upon you for proclaiming the good news. May those who come behind us find us faithful!

²Matthew 25:40

³1 Thessalonians 2:5-7

⁴1 Thessalonians 2:7

⁵1 Thessalonians 2:11

⁶1 Thessalonians 2:8

⁷“And So It Goes” © 1989, Sony BMG Music Entertainment