

Reckless Love: Week Three – Lavish Love

March 15, 2020 – Pastor Katie Matson-Daley

We're in our third week of our "Reckless Love," series, where we are looking at how we can learn to love God better by loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Two weeks ago we "Began with Love," and were challenged to wake up each morning looking for ways to love. Not only that, but to begin every interaction with folks with love. Last week we talked about "expanding the circle." We talked about how it can be tempting to keep our circle of love pretty narrow or full of people "like us," but that God has a scriptural imperative that we would expand our circle of love to include people different than us. In our book studies this week we talked about how expanding the circle of love includes learning to love ourselves. Guilt and shame can hold us back from loving ourselves.

I don't know if I've made this explicit before, so I will today, the letter of the first word for the series is significant and is spelling out "Be, LOVE," B-E-L-O-V-E, So today, we come to the third letter in our series, we had "B, Begin with love." And "E, Expand the circle," and now, "L, Lavish Love."

Lavish is an interesting word. When I heard it at first, I thought of that old show, "Lifestyles of The Rich and Famous." There's an extravagance and abundance to lavish love. Lavish is also a unique word in that it can be both an adjective, something that describes the kind of love that is being shown, but it can also be a verb, you can lavish love on someone.

The opposite of lavish as an adjective is meager or stingy. The opposite of lavish as a verb is begrudgingly, reluctantly.

Lavish feels like an uncomfortable word in our current context. We've cancelled all in-person events at church this week. Grocery stores, Walmarts, Targets and other places are reporting empty shelves. There is news of people hoarding supplies like hand sanitizer or toilet paper and selling them at exorbitant rates on the internet. We have a healthy impulse to be careful in times like these, but sometimes that carefulness becomes stinginess or meagerness.

But we are people marked by the love of a lavishly loving God. 1 John tells us that by calling us children of God we have been lavished with great love, and that when Christ appears, we will be like him.

The love God has for us is generous, abundant, extravagant, lavish. God continues to give the name child, daughter, son, to us. But not only that, this extravagant, lavish, beautifully generous love transforms us so that we, 1 John 3 reminds us, will be like Christ. We will be like this extravagantly lavishly loving God.

What does that mean though?

Philippians 2 gives us a little idea.

“2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.”

Lavish love means spending out. Emptying ourselves of our privileges and comforts. Christ, His very nature God made himself nothing, taking on the nature of a servant became obedient to death.

And the response of the Father was to lavish love on Christ. Philippians 2 continues, **“Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.”**

We are becoming like Christ; that is our hope. To receive God's lavish love, to pour out love lavishly on those around us, to receive more of God's lavish love, it is hopefully a beautiful virtuous cycle.

In his chapter on lavish love, Tom Berlin asks, "What would the world look like if people invested their creativity and energy on love?"

Here's what I think it might look like in times like these:

- Maybe someone with gifts for organizing could set up a system for connecting people who are practicing social isolation or self-quarantine with people who are at lower risk, to help run errands. That would be investing energy and creativity on love in a Covid-19 world.
- Here's another idea. Maybe someone who is home could write cards to people who are working in healthcare or trying to manage the crisis. Maybe children could create art to send to people who are isolating. Maybe there are other ways that you could invest your energy in love during this unusual time.
- Maybe all of us could pray for a few different people each day to experience the lavish love of Christ. I am sure that there are lots of ways that that we can invest our creativity and energy into lavish love. I know that you can come up with some that I haven't thought of. I imagine the spirit meeting us in new ways in this unusual season.

But here's the other thing that I know. Lavishly loving during a pandemic is hard. I was talking with Ben Ingebretson, the Minnesota and Dakota's New Church Development Director this week, and he was telling me that historically during times of crisis in the country people respond with a lot of generosity and love when there is a war or an act of terror or a natural disaster. We organize rebuilding efforts, donate money, volunteer, share and even treat strangers with more kindness. But when the threat to our community is an illness, we have the opposite reaction, we hoard, we get mean to strangers, and we live in fear of people who are hurting rather than in love. If we are going to practice lavish love, we are going to need help. Jesus of course sets a beautiful standard, but we need more than a standard, we need help from the Holy Spirit.

Tom Berlin writes:

The call of constant love means that we're going to need Jesus, not just to set the standard for us, but to work in our lives.

We're going to need to ask Jesus to help us see the world and its people as he sees them, and love them the way he loves them.

We will need to cultivate practices to keep us connected to Christ, so that we can actually follow the standard he sets in the sermon on the plain, along with the rest of his teaching and the life that we witness in the gospels.

This dependence on Christ is exactly what he had in mind.

Only when we learn to yield and ask him to exercise Lordship over our lives will we learn to love our neighbors as ourselves.

So my invitation to you my beloved, is that you would know as Paul writes in Ephesians, “how deep and wide and long and high is the love of Christ,” and that as you ask the Lord of Love to lead you, you would lavish love of greater and greater depths, widths, lengths and heights to those around you. Even if we are physically separated, we are spiritually connected and the love that Christ lavishes to us is needed in this world.