

Love God

Created to Live SENT, message series

September 18, 2011

I've heard it said that everyone eventually comes to the place where they meet their own mortality and realize they can't do life alone.

That time came for me at 2 a.m. in the morning, May 21, when I couldn't sleep because the pain was too great. My mind was racing and it wouldn't stop no matter how much I prayed. Belinda was crashed on the couch in the living room. We were both were dealing with tragedy. Our daughter Megan, 21 months old, died in her sleep the previous morning and we were left to put the pieces of what just happened together.

In my grief I cried out to God incredulous that He allowed Megan to die. How could He? It wasn't that I thought I was so righteous but she was so young and innocent! My heart hurt beyond whatever capacity for pain I thought I had.

I don't know that I really expected to hear anything from Him; venting was more what I had in mind.

My Son Died Too

But in the darkness of that moment, in my spirit, I heard this thought drop into my mind and I believe it came from God, *I know how you feel my Son died too*. That got my attention! I sat up. Was God speaking to me in a spiritual way? After I got over my surprise it brought me comfort to know God was there with me in the pain. I felt His peace. He said He understood. I didn't hear condemnation for my doubt. I felt His compassion in a way that words don't describe.

After a brief pause the thought continued *...And I willingly sent my Son to die so you could live*. I knew in a mental way that Jesus died on the cross for the sin of the world. Now that I knew what it FELT like to lose someone I loved. It was incomprehensible to me that God the Father would CHOSE for His only Son to die. And yet that is the choice God, the Father, made to send His Son Jesus to pay for the sin of the world. Incredible! The love of God was never more real to me than it was at that moment. I was still in pain but I felt His presence and His comfort was salve to my soul.

I wasn't looking for an explanation, I would later, but at the moment I needed to know that there WAS a God who loves and that He WOULD come near. He wasn't distant. He wasn't unfeeling. His heart shared hurt with mine. He didn't condemn me He joined me.

I couldn't do it alone but with His help I could face the new day. I accurately understood that

our family would never be the same but if He would walk with us we would find a new normal. We had to--life comes at you fast and hard and you better be prepared or you get run over.

Friends, we aren't created to do life alone. Just minutes earlier I was tempted to doubt whether God had my best interests in mind. I wasn't sure I could trust Him. But He knew exactly where I was and what I was going through and He knew how to reach me.

Start Praying

I've heard it said, *when you can't find God start praying and He will find you*. That was true for me that night.

Some of you are going through pain right now. God is there for you. The scriptures tell us Jesus was tested in every way like we are. He went through what He did so I could say, *I know...I understand...I'm here for you*.

Let's take a moment here for those with hurting hearts and give the pain to Jesus. We aren't going to hurry through this. Let's sit with it for a minute so you can feel your feelings.

Now give them to the Father...

Let the Holy Spirit minister to you...

Meet us here God. Wrap your arms around your children. Hold us close. Love on us. Forgive us for our doubts, fears and the times we've turned away from You. Cleanse us. Fill us with your Spirit. Take over in us. Lead us in Your ways. We choose Your path today. Carry us when we can't walk. We may be walking through the valley of the shadow today but You are with us and we can do whatever we need to do because You live in us. Thank You for being here for us. I'm sorry we've doubted but turn our doubt to faith. We believe in You and we believe You will get us to the finish line of life. Amen.

Healing

God carried me and my family through the grieving process and over time brought us to a place of healing. We've often shared with others what we learned in our grief. Day by day God's grace brought truth and people into our lives who led us lovingly into restoration. We will always miss Megan but we are no longer debilitated and we are stronger for our loss. It is a great consolation to know we will be reunited with her in heaven and live together with her in eternity.

I regularly doubt things, often as an exercise in searching for truth, but I've not doubted since that day that God's posture toward me is love. That's true for you too. I realized then that what God wants from us is for us to trust Him and to love Him in relationship.

It's all about relationship

Here is the great truth I've learned about life—*it is all about relationship*. God wants relationship with us, with me, and with you. And life is about relating to others.

If we don't do relationships well we won't do life well.

When Jesus came to teach us how to find relationship with the Father and Spirit He did it by calling disciples to follow Him. The best learning always comes with application in relationship. He didn't simply point them to the scriptures He lived truth out in their presence. John, one of his disciples, called him a *living word*.

Don't go it alone

I know this about you even if I don't know you well. You were not created to live life alone. You too will come to times where you can't do it. God designed you to desire relationship with Him.

Without Him there is a God shaped hole in your soul. You need God and you need others. Life will prove that to you if you give it time. I want to see you become all that God made you to be.

Living sent

When you follow Jesus you find life as it was meant to be. There is a harmony in loving God, loving people and living out the love of Jesus in this life we call *SENT*.

I'm a visual guy and it helps me understand things when I draw pictures of how things relate. Here is how I picture the life Jesus wants us to live.

3 circle diagram here

Framework

These three circles give us a good framework for organizing the efforts of our lives. The top left circle, the Love God circle is our topic today. The top right circle we call Love people and the bottom circle depicts living out the love of Jesus. The area in the center is the focus of this four part message series we call *Sent*.

In order to understand what it means to live *Sent* we need to better understand what happens in each of the three circles.

Love God

Today I want to direct our attention toward loving God.

Focus on the Love God diagram

And the thing I want us to understand loud and clear is that loving God is about building a relationship. It is NOT about a routine even one as positive as having a daily time with God. It is NOT about a ritual like coming to church. You could come just to mentally check off the box of *I did my church thing*. It is not about religion—I need to pray the prayer of forgiveness and take communion weekly. As good as those things can be they can also be empty. They

represent faulty thinking that there is some formula that I need to get to add up just right so God will bless me and answer my prayers.

God wants a real relationship. One that is dynamic where perhaps you do set aside time each morning for prayer but throughout the day you whisper prayers to Him that are conversational. You step out of a meeting, look out a window and breathe a prayer that says, *God the stakes are high with this deal. Please give me Your words and Your thoughts. God make my desires line up with yours. God help me live the life that is Sent.*

Just like friends and lovers enjoy talking and staying in touch throughout the day God wants you to take time to listen to Him. Go for a walk and invite Him to speak to you. Take a break at work and read a Proverb or Psalm. Give Him a chance to get involved in your day. Ask if you can get on His frequency so you can hear what He is saying to you. Make each day a day you talk with God in a running conversation.

If you don't know where to get started I suggest you memorize the Lord's Prayer in **Matthew 6:9-13** and pray it daily. Let's take a moment and pray this together. Don't let it be like ritual. Think with me that you are standing face to face with Jesus. Imagine that for a moment. Look Him in the eye and ask Him for His help for you life in this way:

The Lord's Prayer (paraphrase)

⁹ *"This, then, is how you should pray:*

"Father, Your name is holy. (This is like addressing God with a compliment)

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven. (This is a commitment to cooperate with Him)

¹¹ *Please meet my needs today. (This is an honest expression of needs, friends talk this way. There is nothing to BIG for God and nothing to little to escape His interests)*

¹² *Forgive me for the times I've gone my own way,*

and I will forgive those who've done me wrong. (This is a plea for healing in relationships)

¹³ *Don't let temptation get the best of me*

but give me victory over the enemy. (This is siding with God)

Can you see how it changes things to turn this prayer into a real conversation? This is what

Jesus had in mind. You could start your day with conversation like this or end it. You could pause during the middle of the day or even pray while you are driving or running for that matter.

Each one of the lines can become a whole subject of prayer. That's why I encourage you to memorize it and make it your own. In this way prayer comes alive.

Friends talk often during the day. They also love to listen to the other.

Youversion.com

And let me give you an idea for how to listen to God and get more of His word into your day. I've talked to you several times about using Youversion.com. I mentioned you can set a reading plan and I encourage you to do that. I try to read several chapters from the Bible every day. In fact, I've promised God I won't read the paper or email or websites until I've taken time to read the Bible first.

You may not know that you can also listen to the Bible. Take a look at the screen shot. Press the button on the bottom left and it will play the scripture for you.

[Screen shot here of Youversion.com with button circled.](#)

Listen to the Word

There are times I put the scripture for the day on my phone. Set my phone on the seat beside me and press play. It is a great way to hear from God. It is almost like a voice mail ☐

I want you to discover the joy of relating to God in a moving, ongoing, dynamic relationship. Yes there will be church services but you can be here without worshipping. You can listen without applying what you hear. What I really want for you is to relate to God like He wants to relate to you—like a friend to a friend.

Loving God is similar to developing a relationship with a person

Jesus called His first disciples to be with Him and I believe He is calling you to be with Him. Loving God is a relationship--that is what makes it rich and real.

Have you ever noticed that when people hang around together they become more like one another? And the more time they spend together the more alike they become! [Here is the good news for today, the more you hang with Jesus in this kind of real relationship the more like Him you become.](#) It takes surrender and effort but much of it is pure joy!

SENT

This kind of practice is what makes the SENT life possible.

[Show Diagram of the SENT logo](#)

When we are living SENT there is an intersection of loving God in relationship, loving people as a way of life and living out on mission every day. The Sent life can't be reduced to a formula. It is not an equation where we find some way to appease God and we still remain in control of our life. It is the place where you lose yourself in becoming like Him.

Review

Last week we talked about the tug of war between living for Self and living SENT. We acknowledged that there is a tension between the human desire to say, *it's all about me* and the spirit's desire to say, *it's not about me*.

Pick up big piece of rope with a knot in it. Hold it up and talk about the tug of war

Tug of War Illustration

Stage a look at the tension by having three people come up. Have a big person on each end one representing God and one representing the enemy. The person represents Self if he/she is pulling with the enemy or represents Sent if he/she is pulling with the life that is SENT. SENT = the determination to grow to be "like Jesus."

If we pull on the Self side there is tension with God. Or if we pull long enough and hard enough He says, *have it your way* and we experience the consequences of our choices.

Or we can join forces with the Spirit and pull against the Self life. We can align ourselves with God and His plan. The power with us is greater and we will absolutely win if we make the choice to live Sent.

The question is, where are we aligning our efforts today? Do we love God in a relationship? Do we trust Him? Listen to Him? Cooperate with Him? Or do we try to play both sides of the rope? One day we are pulling on this side and the next on that side.

Here is the big question—who do you trust? Self, the enemy or Jesus?

Will you make the choice today to align yourself over here with the person of Jesus and never turn back. Seriously, there are times in our lives where we make a definitive choice that is a game changer. This is a day like that. Come over here—grab this side and pull for all you are worth. (the two pull until "Self" falls flat)

The Tension Goes Away

The tension only goes away when one side give up or is conquered. When you go all in and quit holding out on God—Jesus takes over and divine power is applied to the battles of your life. There is always going to be some tension but what you can absolutely win over is the daily back and forth because you've settled that.

This is the place where you feel like heaven touches earth. It is where divine power enters this

life. There is healing in relationships and there is freedom from selfishness to live life on mission. There is a return cycle of God's peace and presence that is a natural high. This is the only way to live!

When Jesus said, *I came that you might have life and have it to the full.* John 10:10 NIV
This is the kind of life, the life that is Sent, that He had in mind.

Play the Video Clip of Rebecca Everett here

Let's Review

Let's take a turn toward home today. I'm asking you to make a definite choice today to love God. Team up with Jesus and invite God to form the life of Christ in you. Nourish this decision with spiritual practices that will help you win the tug of war with self. Live the Jesus mission every day. Stay in a surrendered posture every day.

So let's talk about how we do that. I'm going to share with you a way to stay surrendered to all that God has for you.

Conclusion

Sometimes I like to walk and pray. It works well when I'm up early because if I sit still I can easily fall back asleep. On this day I was walking and praying in the gym at Indian Creek. Sometimes I will pray certain scriptures out loud as a prayer and that morning I was praying my way through **Philippians 3**.

I prayed, *I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.* (verse 10 NLT). I liked that part, I said, *Yes God I want that!* Power and miracles sounded good. The next sentence read,

(new slide) *I want to suffer with him, sharing his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead.* Wait a minute! Can't I have one without the other? It was too late. God heard my prayer (and He knew my heart).

The Holy Spirit began to speak to me, *you can't have a resurrection without a death. You can't know me if you don't know the sufferings of Christ.* I shuttered inside. This sounded ominous. I wondered what God was trying to tell me. Was this a precursor of difficulty to come? Was it too late to take back my prayer? The truth was that I really did want to know Him. I didn't know what all this would mean but it was the desire of my heart.

I can't explain what happened next with logic or with words but I had an experience with God that I'll try to describe because I think it relates to everyone. God brought the story of Abraham and Isaac to my mind. You can find the story in **Genesis 22**. It is the story of Abraham and Isaac.

I'll summarize. Abraham waited a lifetime for the son God promised to him. His wife Sarah bore him Isaac in their old age when for all practical purposes they shouldn't have been able to bear a child. Isaac was the answer to a lot of heartache in Abraham's life. I'm sure he wondered at times if he failed God, missed God's plan or just was deceived in believing. But his faith was stronger than his doubt and God gave him the gift that was the treasure of his life. Then in Genesis 22, God asked Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice. This didn't make sense to Abraham because he'd waited so long. God finally provided and now he was supposed to sacrifice his son? God wasn't even for human sacrifice so this made no sense to Abraham.

That morning God communicated with me that He wanted me to offer to Him that which was most dear to me. That was easy to figure out, it was my family. I knew what it was to have a child die and I began to imagine the worst. I could picture my wife Belinda's face before me. I thought of Kristen, my oldest daughter; and my sons Jeremy and Luke. The thought of another loss was so heavy I could hardly walk. I fell to my knees and began to cry begging God to find another way.

While I was on my knees I heard these words in my spirit. *Imagine that you were playing solitaire and all you had were face cards. I want you to place every face that is important to you in rows facing up. I can pick up any card I want and take it away from you and your response to me is to say, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord."* The last sentence is from Job 1:21 NLT. I wasn't necessarily familiar with that verse at the time but I would become more so later.

What I thought was bad just got worse; now it wasn't just my family that I was asked to surrender but everything and every other person that was important to me, friends, co-workers, Indian Creek, ministry in general, my home—everything! This was overwhelming to me. It felt like a warning from God that I was about to have an experience like Job did in Job 1:13-21.

There were no warm fuzzies that morning but there was ultimately a sense of God's presence and His peace gave me the strength to get up and go home. I knew my obedience was about to be tested I just didn't know how. It didn't take long to find out.

I'll spare you the details but at the time life was going splendidly well and over the next several years everything important to me was tested and some were taken. But if I stopped the story there I would do it a gross misrepresentation. The other side of the coin was that the peace and power of God's presence became more and more real to me. I really did come to know Him in ways I never knew were possible. I'm still a work in process and this purifying work is still going on but I wouldn't trade anything I lost for the tremendous gain of becoming more like Him.

Don't be afraid of God or anything He asks you to do. Offer to lay down the cards of your life before Him and tell Him you want to know Him whatever it takes. This is true love. This is true

worship. This is what it means to live sent.

Your Exercise

We are going to pass out cards today and I want each of us to take three cards. It doesn't matter what cards you draw out. I want you to look at those cards and think of the things or persons that are the most precious to you. You may see the face of your child or a spouse but they can also represent your work, your career, or maybe it is not your vocation but your avocation—that which you love (whenever you have free time this is what you love to do). One of your cards could represent something that you don't necessarily love but something you believe you can't do without. It is something big to you. Maybe it represents your past or your present identity. And even the thought of losing it makes you shudder inside.

Name those cards. Picture who or what they represent. And now I want to lead us in a prayer of surrender.

First I'm going to give you time to come to grips with what it would mean to lay each one down as a sacrifice. We aren't going to hurry because I want you to feel the power these have in your life. What if today God is asking you, like Abraham, to give them all up? I think He is.

There are no accidents with God. You are here today for a divine reason. God wants you to trust Him with everything important to you. There can be no other gods in your life. He can and He may take every one of these important things in your future. What will you do in that day? Will you curse God? Will you pout? Will you pull away?

Or are you willing, like Christ, to be stripped of everything precious to you to if that is what it means to fulfill the will of the Father. You can't live the Sent life if your arms are full of the baggage of life.

The reality is that you will eventually leave it all here. You can't take any of this with you into eternity. We often live like our greatest goal is to arrive **safely** at death. And we somehow think that true life is having what we want, all of it, and that it is God's role to give it to us. If He doesn't we feel like He is failing us. We don't want a God we want a genie in the bottle. We want to be the god and we want Him to be our servant.

But that is Self thinking. What God wants to do today is teach us that the Self directed life will lead us into bondage. The things that we love if we get too possessive of them actually end up controlling us and we are not free. We can become so fearful of losing one or more that we become bound up in protecting and preserving—that becomes our life. And it is no way to live.

Today God wants to set you free by reminding you who is God. He is and there is no other. He wants you to love Him more than anything. He wants you to follow so closely and so obediently that you would leave everything else or lay it down if He asks. So now He is asking.

What will you do? I want you to sit in this for a minute. Go there with me.

Wait

Will you word your own prayer to God?

I want to word a prayer for us that puts into words what it means to lay down our cards.

Prayer

You can get up and move if you want.

The worship team is going to come and sing songs of worship. You can make the place where you are a place of prayer. You can come and receive the elements of communion, the bread and the juice. They represent sacrifice. The bread represents the broken body of Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane He laid down all His cards and the cross was the result. There He spilled His precious blood. And in doing so He purchased your forgiveness. Receiving communion is a way to say *thank you* to Him. It is also a way to say, *You didn't waste your life for nothing! You wasted Your life for me and I'm going to follow You and do the same for others. I will live the life that is Sent like you did.*

There are also prayer partners who would be glad to pray with you. Please respond as the Spirit leads you.