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i-mote: The Love of Jesus

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by Dr. Matt Hook

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

Here’s something sort of freaky. Jesus didn’t talk much about love. (There’s a sermon right there). Really, there’s only one time, ironically on the night he was betrayed, when He talked much about love. It was more a teaching moment, rather than a one on one “I love you” thing. See what I mean: In Matthew’s gospel, it’s God who says *“This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased”* Matthew 3:17, when Jesus is baptized by John. And Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount *“You’re familiar with the old saying ‘Love your friend’ and its unwritten companion ‘hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst...If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that.”* Matthew 5:43, 44, 46. And when people ask Jesus, *“36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”* Matthew 22:37—39.

John writes a little more. Jesus confronted even religious people about love: *“39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life... 42 but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.”* John 5:38—42. That’s harsh!

On the night before Jesus was crucified, John says Jesus showed his disciples the full extent of his love...by washing his disciples’ feet—doing one of the lowliest servant’s jobs! Again, weird. Jesus said *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* John 15:9. Then He said *“Greater love has no one than this. That you lay down your life for your friends.”* John 15:13. And he said he gives his followers a new command, to love one another. *“As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* John 13:34—35.

Jesus taught about love, but didn’t talk about love. He just expressed it, to all kinds of people, especially the unlovable ones. What a difference God could make in your life if you loved the outcasts at your school, or at your work! And here’s the crazy thing: Jesus was the perfect human. He lived in love. He lived out love. Jesus was the only perfectly sane and normal person who ever lived. That means that when we get it right, we live *in love!* When we get it right we live *out* love. What a way to go through life! You may say “that sounds cool, but you don’t know the relational disasters I’ve had in my life.” And if you’re saying that today, I’d say “Welcome to the human race!” But why is it that we have such a hard time with love?

Lots and lots of reasons. Lots and lots of blame. Like growing up with conditional love from our parents, for one. But, if I had to boil it down, I’d say the reason you and I have such a hard time with love is because you and I really don’t love God. If Jesus’ greatest and first commandment is *“Love the Lord your God with everything you’ve got”* that means the first thing and greatest thing we have to have lined up is our love for God, so everything else in our lives can line up. No wonder we have such a hard time with love! It’s the

same reason they're taking so much time pouring the foundation just outside. If that's not lined up, the rest of the building, and the rest of our lives won't line up either. There is a story about a building that developed a crack in the wall of the 43rd floor. But when the guys came to fix it, they didn't go to the 43rd floor. They went to the sub-basement. The *foundation* is where the problem is. Or when you realize in the middle of the day that your shirt is off by one button. You have to get the bottom button right for it to work out at the top! It's the same with our lives. When we build our foundation and the rest of our lives on something other than loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, we'll always have a hard time with love.

You and I don't really love God. There's an easy test to see how much you love something. All you have to do is observe what it takes to make you stop. Sure, I say I love Jesus. But all it takes is my kid to have a conflict for me not to go. All it takes is for me to not get enough sleep on Saturday night. All it takes is for me to really want to get ready for the football game...or the shopping spree. I don't really love God more than these.

You and I don't really love God. Because if we did, we would sin a whole lot less. We would DO a whole lot more! We would give ourselves to a lot fuller living, and we would love a whole lot more...

We've fallen for this myth that the more love we have for God, the less love we'll have for everything else. But Jesus showed us that the more love we have for God, the more we experience God. The more full our lives will be! I'm tired of skimming—through life, through relationships, and through my schedule. Woven through it all is that I'm tired of skimming through my love relationship with God!

So then, what does loving God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength look like? It looks like reading the Bible and asking not "What does this mean?" but "What can I *obey*" in order to live out and live in my love for God? It looks like putting God at the beginning of your thoughts during the day, and closing out your day with him too. Waking up 15 minutes early to spend some time with God. That's why we say Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. THERE IS NO FORMULA, there's just obedience.

Suppose you planned to go fishing or watch a ballgame or go to the mall. Then God confronts you with an opportunity to join Him in something He wants to do. (All around you, there are people whose lives God wants to intercept.) What would you do? Most of us would either say "I'll finish my plans, and then fit God's plans into the next available slot in my schedule." Or I would assume God already knew my plans, so this new assignment must not be from Him. Or we would work out a way to do both what I want and what God wants. But if I love God first, I guess I would adjust my plans to join God in what He was about to do.

This is where I think most of us are: We wouldn't interrupt a fishing trip or a football game for anything in the world. In our minds, we say we want to serve and love God and people, but we keep eliminating anything from our lives that is going to interfere with our own plans. Really, we're so self-centered that we don't recognize the times when God comes to us.

God has the right to interrupt your life. He is Lord. When you accepted Him as Lord, you gave Him the right to help Himself to your life any time He wants. And here's the difference between my love and Jesus' love. When God has something for me to do, 5 times out of 10 I say "I'm sorry, that's not on my schedule." And I wind up missing out. Jesus, however, loved God so much so that he put God first. He loved God *first*.

Okay, so I don't really love God first, but I do love good things and noble things first... But here's the catch: it's easy to see that my drug habit or sex on the side is not loving God. That doesn't fool anybody. What's harder for us to see, and thus is more dangerous are those things that *are* virtues, good things, but not quite God-first things. For example, love for your children is good, but if we think that means putting them before our commitment to God and His people, it becomes demonic. Love of gardening is great. God Himself was a gardener! But when that love surpasses our loving God with all we got, even it becomes demonic. A vacation is great, but if it comes before our worship of God, we've let our love slip. Friendship is one of God's greatest gifts. But if your friends make you hide your faith, or do stuff that doesn't put God first, even that

becomes trouble. Productivity is good, but when it takes us away from our key relationships and our rest and even church, it's demonic. In some ways, these good things are more dangerous than the really "bad" stuff out there, because we can hide behind it our whole lives, until we're reduced to nothing but a busy schedule, or a wealthy corpse, or an empty life. Loving the really bad stuff doesn't fool anybody. But loving the good stuff rather than loving God with your whole heart and mind and soul and strength has created this society that leaves God and then leaves even the world that God loves behind, and we stop making a difference for Christ. Loving the good stuff rather than the God first stuff is so prevalent in our culture, it's become an epidemic, leaving us more empty and more skewed in our love of God than ever before.

Did you ever stop to think that maybe the reason your love is so lukewarm or even cold is because you don't express your emotion *enough*? You don't get angry enough, or don't hate evil enough, or challenge the assumptions enough when you're frustrated, or get broken up enough? Or maybe your love is so tepid because you are so self-centered that you miss opportunity after opportunity that God throws your way? Oh, it's all for good reasons! But it's not God first kind of love.

I believe God wants Dexter Methodist Church to be known for is not our size, not our sermons, not our singing, not our strategy, not even our beautiful surroundings, or our new buildings, *but for our love*. Let's work on this one: let's equip one another on how to love and care...for God first! That's what Christianity is all about, loving God and loving each other. People are not looking for religion, they are looking for a family. I'm not looking for a friendly church, I'm looking for friends. They are not looking for doctrine; they are looking for love.

What would happen if you and I put our love for God first this week?

Would it tear us apart?

Would it drive people away from us?

Or would it fill us in such a way that we began to notice God more?

And if you're around someone who can spot God, and when God's up to something, just that can change your life. And God calls you into this fuller, more human, more love-filled life than you have ever known.

You enter into this grand adventure called the love of God, which offers literally never-ending expression of life, and love.

Let us pray: Lord, we admit we haven't loved you with our whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.

Forgive us, we pray. Fill us again, that our foundation may be in You alone. Help us love the unlovable, help us reach out in Your love, that we may be your witnesses in all our love. Amen!