

“Love Is Sharing Your French Fries”

John 15:9-17

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Recently, several four to eight year old children were asked what love is. They replied with some very insightful responses.

“Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other.”

“Love is what makes you smile when you are tired.”

“Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt and he wears it every day.”

“Love is when mommy gives daddy the best piece of chicken.”

“Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you have left him alone all day.”

“Love is when your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you.”

“Love is when mommy makes coffee for daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him to make sure it is ok.”

“Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs.”

I believe Jesus would get a chuckle out of these descriptions of love, just as we have. He would especially appreciate the last one, which reveals the sacrificial nature of love.

Love was certainly on Jesus’ mind when he gathered in the Upper Room with the disciples just hours before his betrayal and arrest. He mentioned it nine times in this portion of the farewell discourse, highlighted by this final charge: **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”**

What do you think your last words to your family will be? I hope we all have a lot more time to think about it.

Do you remember Randy Pausch? He was the co-author of the book, The Last Lecture. He died soon after writing the book at the age of forty-seven.

Dr. Pausch was a professor of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Five years ago he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and began treatments. A year later, he was told his condition had worsened, and he had only a few months to live. As a result, he resigned from his teaching position and moved with his wife and three children to Chesapeake, Virginia to be close to Jai's family.

His final duty as a professor, though, was to deliver "The Last Lecture" at Carnegie Mellon. Annually, a professor is selected to address the question, "What wisdom would you impart to the world if you knew this was your last lecture?" Since Pausch had only months to live and was leaving the school, he was asked to deliver this lecture on September 18, 2007. Millions of people have watched the "The Last Lecture" on You Tube or have read the book by the same title.

In the lecture, Pausch spoke about the importance of overcoming obstacles, living life to the fullest and helping others achieve their dreams. Here are some of the gems he shared with his students and readers.

"Brick walls are not there to keep us out, but to show us how badly we want something."

"If I had only three words of advice, they would be, 'Tell the truth.' If I had three more, they would be, 'All the time.' "

"I've never found that anger made a situation better. So why get angry and bitter over having cancer. I don't choose the cards dealt to me, but I do choose how I play them and I do not choose to be angry or an object of pity."

"It's not about achieving your dreams, but how you live your life. If you live properly, dreams will come to you."

"No one is pure evil. Be patient. Their good side will emerge."

"Don't complain. Just work harder."

"Keep a crayon in your pocket as a reminder of your childhood. Smell it occasionally so you will never lose your child-like wonder for life."

Time listed him as one of the most influential people in the world in 2008, and I understand why. His lecture and book inspired millions to live each day to the fullest and die with dignity. What a healthy way he chose to confront his mortality.

If you listened to his lecture, do you recall how he ended it? He said that he did not write the lecture for the students at Carnegie Mellon University. He wrote it for his three children, Dylan (6), Logan (4) and Chloe (2). These were his parting words to them, which he hoped would inspire and guide them the rest of their lives.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,” Jesus said to his disciples in his last lecture. These are simple, succinct, profound and obviously important words meant to guide and inspire them the rest of their lives.

Why was it so important they love one another? It was the only thing which would keep them together. A thousand things would try to pull them apart; only one would keep them connected and focused upon their mutual mission.

A dying father asked one of his four children to go to the yard and gather five sticks and some string. When the sticks and string were brought to him, he handed one of the sticks to his son and asked him to break it, which he did easily.

Then, he tied the other four sticks together and handed the bundle to this same boy. “Break it,” he said. He couldn’t.

“You need each other,” he said, “and the only thing which will keep you connected is love. So love each other in the good times and bad. Love each other when it is easy and when it is hard. Love each other in spite of everything.”

It appears Jesus was saying the same thing to his disciples.

What are you doing which is making it hard for someone to love you right now? Do you expect them to love you anyway?

At times, love is tough. It compels us to look in a mirror and see what others see and hear what they hear. Is this one of those times for you?

Do you need to be honest about what you are doing to hurt others? Do you need to quit making excuses and do something about it?

Is it time to quit arguing or finding fault with everything and everybody around you? Do you need to apologize and be more respectful? Do you need to exercise more discipline and self-control? Do you need to be less self-absorbed and more aware of other’s needs? Do you need to seek counseling or a support group which can help you overcome destructive addictions?

I believe loving others begins by loving ourselves. “Love your neighbor as yourself,” Jesus told his disciples near the beginning of his public ministry.

It is hard to treat others with respect when you don't like who you are and what you are doing. Why not do something about it?

Love is a journey of small steps, not acts of grandeur. What are you going to work on this week which will make it easier for others to love you?

Who is making it hard for you to love them right now? How weary are you growing? How much longer can you love them?

Why do you think Jesus mentioned love nine times in this passage? I think the disciples had pushed him to the brink several times, and he knew they would do the same to each other after he was gone. The potential for them to turn on each other and go their separate ways certainly existed, which would have been catastrophic.

Don't forget, Jesus called a tax collector, Matthew, and a zealot, Simon, as two of his disciples. He could not have selected two people with more differences. It would be like having Rush Limbaugh and Rachel Maddow as two of his twelve disciples.

Tax collectors and zealots did not like or trust each other because they had opposing views on how the government should be run. Of course Jesus knew this, but he selected them anyway. Why?

I think he wanted to demonstrate the transforming and unifying power of redemptive love. If these two people could get along and work together, others could, too.

How do you do this, love unlovely people or those who are different? I suppose it begins by realizing you are not perfect or live up to everyone's expectations.

I have a friend who says about those around him, "If they can love me, I can love them." Wise words.

You also keep your eyes focused on what's really important, the greater good. Sacrifices made on behalf of others birth the kind of hope which leads to change. Someone has to be the first to respond to evil with good and break the vicious cycle of destructive behavior. This is the basis of the love Jesus embodied, referred to in scripture as *agape*.

You must ask for God's help, though, because this is bigger than you are. You need God's help to break free from self-obsession or control and tune your hearts to the needs of others.

Why do you think Jesus prayed so often alone on a hillside? I think he was asking God, the source of love, for the ability to love his disciples in spite of their selfish, stubborn,

immature and petty ways. You see, he did not lay down his life just once for them, but over and over again.

Where did Jesus learn to love people like this? “As my Father has loved me, so I have loved you,” he said in that last lecture. This was the gracious and tenacious nature of God, and he was determined to embody it.

I think his earthly parents also influenced him. Do you recall how loving Joseph was to Mary when he discovered she was going to have a baby before they married? Even when he thought she had been promiscuous, he decided to “put her away privately” instead of publically humiliating her. This was a man with a loving heart and no doubt he had a great impact upon Jesus, as did other good neighbors and fellow believers in the synagogue.

Who taught you to take the high road and love those who are different or unlovely?
Who needs you to model it now? Based upon our text, I can think of no higher calling.