

“Staying In Love—Re-Modeling”

We are on part 2 of “Staying in Love.” We’re talking about staying in love because all you need to fall in love is a pulse. Staying in love requires a plan. Last week we started with the Big Question: **Is it possible for two people to fall in love and stay in love forever?** I think the answer is yes! I think there’s something in us that even though it doesn’t seem probable when you look around—in culture there is nothing helping us with this at all—there is still something in us that says, “I still think it’s possible.” There is that desire in you and me and it doesn’t go away no matter how many bad relationships you’ve been through or seen, it’s in you to want that. It’s the image of God in you. The question is, is it possible? And the answer is yes.

Now, we looked at a passage last week where Jesus said, “Love one another.” He was saying that if you want to stay in love, you’ve got to make love a what? Did somebody say a LOT? No! **You’ve got to make love a verb.** That is, you’ve got to take the noun you fell into and make it a verb, something you do.

Jesus added some more insight to that statement when he said, “Love one another the way I have loved you.” Jesus was telling us, “I want you to take your cue about how you love from me, not your culture, not from Hollywood, not necessarily from your parents, I want you to learn to love the way that I love.”

So today let’s take an in depth look at what that means. And I’ve got to warn you that this is challenging stuff. But don’t push back. Press in.

Our jumping off place today in scripture is Philippians 2:3-8. Paul’s saying, “Based on what I’ve learned about Jesus, here’s what it looks like to love the way that Jesus loved us.” And he gives some instructions. Now, they’re general instructions about all relationships. But let’s look at these verses from the perspective of that one on one relationship that you hope to have, or are in, or are trying to repair, or are about to formalize through marriage.

Paul writes this, **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit” (Philippians 2:3).** That little phrase “selfish ambition” actually carries the idea of competitiveness. So he’s saying, “Look, if you want to stay in love, don’t compete with each other.” Like, when she’s telling that story and she gets some of the details wrong, don’t interrupt her and say, “No, no, no. That was red honey. There were three of us. It was Friday...” Just let her tell the story wrong, don’t compete. Whatever it is that makes you feel a little insecure where you want to correct and compete, Paul says, “Just don’t. Let it go. Do nothing out of selfish ambition (a competitive spirit) or vain conceit.”

Then he goes on and gives us the opposite and this next phrase is the point of today’s message. This is the phrase where we want to say, “I just don’t think I can do that. I’ll be taken advantage of. It’s too risky.” This is the heart of what it means to be and stay in love. **Rather, in humility value others above yourselves...” (Philippians 2:4).** Literally this means act like he is more important than you. Make decisions as if you really believe she is more important than you.

Have you ever been around somebody more important than you? Well you have. This doesn’t mean some human beings have more intrinsic value than others. That’s not the point. Paul’s challenging us to think of a situation where we were around somebody more important than us. Like, have you ever been to a wedding where you weren’t the bride or groom? Did you notice that when the bride walked in everybody stood, but when you walked in no one noticed? I hate to break it to you but in that particular context, you are not the most important person in the room. Did you notice how people stood in line for hours to talk to them and not you? In that particular context you were not the most important person in the room.

Have you ever been around a national hero, or famous author signing books, or a dignitary or special guest? That person really is more important than you in that setting. You’d even say, “This is a great person and I am honored to be in their presence.”

With that in mind, how do you treat someone like that? Here’s what you do, you defer to them. You don’t interrupt them and say, “No, no, no. I think that was blue not red. Oh you’re wrong there.” You don’t pat them on the back and say, “Posture, posture.” You don’t do any of that. You don’t correct them. You laugh even when they’re not funny. You defer to them because in that moment the key is respect. Respect. “I’m going to treat you as if you are more important than me. I’m going to treat you as if you have more value than me.”

Again, we're not talking about the realm of all humanity and intrinsic value because everybody is important. We're talking about in the moment you defer to them. You show them respect. Through what you say, through what you don't say, the way you say it, you respect them. You treat them, in that moment, as if they are more important than you.

Paul says that's how you treat other people, and specifically that's how you treat the person you are in love with, if you want them to stay in love with you, and you with them. And you do it every single day, in every single decision, you respond as if you believe they are more important than you.

Some of you are thinking, "Hold on, Aaron. I think they'll take advantage of that." Well, they might. "Aaron, I don't know if they'll return the favor." Well, they may not. And that's really none of your business. This is about how you are to treat them.

God is saying, Paul is saying, "Treat that special someone in your life. With a sense of awe." We don't do that, do we? And that's how you fall out of love. You did it when you first met. It was like awe... "Have you met her? Awe..." "He called...awe..." You treated him or her with awe, with special attention, undivided attention. See, you know how to do this. In the beginning it's so much emotion and so much passion, it comes naturally. People who stay in love just keep doing that. They take what came naturally at first and do it intentionally. Every single day, every single opportunity. They treat that person as if they really are more important. That's mutual submission and that's how you stay in love. Value her, value him, treat with a value above yourself.

That's pretty good right there, but Paul elaborates even more. **"...not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Philippians 2:4)**. This can be hard. It's hard for me. I find that I'm mostly interested in the things that interest me. I'm not naturally interested in the things that aren't interesting to me. Can you relate? This means that left to my own, I gravitate emotionally, and with my time, and money, and attention, to the things that interest me. And if the things that interest me aren't the things that interest the person I'm in love with, then we've got a little problem there. Paul says, "Here's what you do. You make the decision, very intentionally, to express interest in the things that interest the person you want to stay in love with."

Maybe your wife is interested in gardening and you're not. She wants to plant this garden and the thing is, the only vegetable you like is the coffee bean and that's not going to happen—it's not even a vegetable. You also know that when she plants this garden she's going to need some stuff—some tools, some equipment and it's going to cost some money. On top of that it's going to take some time and she doesn't have much time anyway and that means less time for you and given you your lovin'! There is nothing about this garden thing that interests you! And you're feeling a little bit left out, maybe even a little bit threatened and you have a decision to make: Are you going to love you and try to talk her out of that? Are you going to ignore it and hope it goes away? If there's a problem are you going to say, "Hey, it's your garden. I didn't plant it. I don't eat from it. Too bad so sad."

So you've got a decision to make. And this is a simple one. There are a lot more complex ones. But here the decision is **not**, "Do I like gardening? Or am I going to eat those vegetables?" The decision is, "Am I going to look to her interests or only mine? Am I just going to listen with one ear when she's talking about her interests because they're not my interests, or am I going to discover what she's interested in and then move in that direction?" That's what you do when you want to stay in love. You don't just tolerate their interests, you find a way to become interested and express interest in what they are interested in—even if that puts you out of your comfort zone.

And here's the thing, you know how to do this. Do you know how I know? Because when you fell in love, you found out what they were into and suddenly, temporarily, you were into it. "Oh, I love to run." You've never run in your life except to get away from a bee! "I'm a runner. Yeah baby, I run." You go to a friend and say, "You got some running shoes that look used that I could borrow." All the sudden you're a runner! Or, "I love to fish." You're on the phone to your dad, "Dad, give me a crash course in fishing..."

We know how to be interested in what they are interested in, but then once we're in we forget to stay there. But if you want to go deep, if you want to stay deep, if you want there to be real, lasting intimacy, then

you live as if they are more important than you. Which means their interests become at least as important as your interests.

Maybe you're going, "That's so ideal, maybe in another world, Aaron." And you want to write all that off. It's like Paul's thinking, "I bet they're reading this going, 'Nobody does that!'" So he takes us now to the part where Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you." Paul says, "Let me kind of illustrate the way that Jesus loves you because that's the model. Here's what it looks like." This is verse five: **"In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage" (Philippians 4:5).**

This is huge. You show up in this relationship and say, "I should at least get 50% of the attention here. I want my fair share. There are certain things I want out of this." Paul says, "Here's Jesus, who was in his very nature, God, and yet not one single time in his earthly ministry did he say, 'Hey, I want some privilege here, throw me a bone, I'm God. Give me a good seat, the best table, don't you know who I am?'" Paul tell us that Jesus just didn't do it. He didn't seek privilege. Jesus never leveraged who he was for his own sake!

You and me, we're tempted to do it all the time, "I was here first, and don't you know who I am, and I bring most of the income into the family, I birthed those kids, I raised those kids..." We've all got leverage points because of who we are and what we've done. Paul's telling us to look at Jesus. Jesus was more important than anybody else in the room. Any time he showed up in the room, he was the bride. Any time he showed up in the room, he was the hero, he was the celebrity, the VIP. Every time he showed up in the room, no matter what room it was, he was the most important person in the room, but he never leveraged that for his own sake. That's the model.

Paul goes on: **"...rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:7-8).** Some translations say, "He emptied himself." Everything he deserved, everything he rightfully had coming to him, all the attention that he was due, he emptied himself of all of that. He emptied himself. You ever heard this? "She's so full of herself! He's so full of himself." 2000 years ago Paul writes that Jesus emptied himself. That's the model. He made a decision. He decided to place himself under. He decided to submit. He decided to subordinate his will. He decided to humble himself. And guess who he humbled himself to? You! And me!

There's a sense in which Jesus had a dilemma. He could either maintain his rights and the respect due him--he could maintain everything he deserved, and have no relationship to humanity. Or he could let go what he deserved in order to have a relationship with humanity. For that to happen he had to give up his rights, his respect and the glory he was due as the son of God. But he couldn't have it both ways.

When Jesus died on the cross for your sin and mine, he put you ahead of himself. He put your forgiveness ahead of his glory. He put your greatest need ahead of what he rightfully deserved. He put you first and me first, he submitted himself to us. Your heavenly Father, through Jesus, opted for relationship over rights. He couldn't have it both ways. And listen, you can't have it both ways either. Neither can I.

We've all seen it done wrong; most of us have done it wrong. You're out somewhere and you see a spouse publicly nagging the other spouse. "Well if only you didn't forget to call and make the reservation again. If you just would have picked up the tickets like I told you. Why can't you slow down just once so we don't get pulled over. Don't forget to grab the chairs, and the diaper bag, you forgot them last time and we had to buy all new ones. Can't you ever get ready on time, ever, we're always running late and your hair doesn't look that much better!" You hear the nagging right there in public and the thing is, the one doing the nagging is right! They've got a genuine reason to be saying what they are.

But here's the reality check: You can spend the rest of your life being right. You can spend the rest of your life winning all the arguments. You can spend the rest of your life shaping him up, or her up. But you will

not be in love in the end. And you will be able to justify everything you did to the counselor or lawyer, because you were right...but you will still have lost that thing you want and cherish the most.

Jesus did not come into the world to be right. He came into the world to submit himself for your sake and mine. In submitting himself, in surrendering himself, in dying for our sin, he discounted the opportunity to be right every single time. He could have nagged everybody in the world to death and been right every single time. "Sinner, sinner, sinner, sinner, sinner. Raise your hand and I'll tell you what you did. Sinner, sinner, sinner, sinner..." He could have walked around telling everybody just how wrong they were and he would have been absolutely right. But we would have no savior.

"Aaron are you saying we should never argue? Are you saying we shouldn't ever express displeasure? Are you saying we shouldn't ever correct each other?" No. I'm saying that at some point in your relationship you have to decide. "Am I going to err on the side of surrendering and submitting myself, or am I going to decide that this is my way, and my rights, and this is how it's done." You can't have it both ways and stay in love.

But I'm telling you. Show me two people who've decided they're going to treat each other like the most valuable person in the world and even the little things seem to fall into place. The reservations will get made and the chairs will get in the trunk. There is a way to resolve every single conflict in a way that's honoring to both people once you decide up front, "I'm going to treat you as if you are the most important person in the room...and in my life." God sent his son Jesus to be the model of love for us.

What would it look like today in your relationship, if you remodeled your love to look more like Jesus? What would it look like if you decided, "I realize I can't have it both ways. I'm going to opt for relationship over being right. I'm going to opt for relationship over my rights. I'm going to opt for relationship over demanding what's due me." What would it look like to consider the interest of that other person ahead of your own interests? Do that, do it, because love is a verb. It's something you do and that's what people who stay in love do over the course of their life together.

Is it hard? It takes some work, but it's a lot, a lot, easier than a bad marriage. Is it hard? It can be at times, but it's a lot cheaper than a divorce. Is it hard? Of course it's hard? Is it worth it? Oh yeah! Just look at somebody who's got that kind of relationship. Are their sacrifices? Yeah, but it's worth it!

But it's a decision you make and if you do, not only will you have fallen in love, you will have taken the most important step to ensure that you stay in love. And the most amazing thing of all is that it's God's plan for you. This week, make love a verb in your relationship. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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