

Spiritual Love, Displayed

Isolation—part 7

June 5, 2022

“Shape us to realize that we exist as persons of value and worth only when we exist in true community with You and with others, even though true community demands that we give up the self-protective maneuverings that we deceive ourselves into thinking are loving ways to relate.” - Larry Crabb

The church community is the laboratory of love. It is a relational laboratory.

DAY 1: Church as lab; members as lab students

1. Romans 12 points us away from ourselves and isolation and toward others, serving them, and being about their good.

2. Context of Romans.

Rom. 1-11—God’s Larger Story in pursuit of redeeming mankind’s tragic lesser story.

Rom. 12:1-2 We surrender ourselves and our lives to God and for God’s purposes

Rom. 12:3 For by grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

3. What follows these huge theological truths about God, fallen man, sin, redemption, and sanctification? What follows are some big picture truths about how we are to relate to all kinds of people and situations.

4. Big picture truths about community:

Rom. 12:4-8 Paul tells the Roman Christians that they are like a body; one body with many different kinds of members. Each has a role; each plays a part, each has gifts and contributions. United, but with vast diversity.

5. Below are four big picture aims that frame how we relate to one another. Jot down your responses to each one.

a. United, though diverse

b. Each member belongs to all the others.

c. Be devoted to one another

d. Each of us is relationally responsible, no matter how we are treated.

6. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 2: Learning how to love, in community (vv. 9-10)

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

1. It's very important to understand what Paul is saying when he tells us "love must be sincere."
2. Paul is not saying we can't love or don't love unless we *feel* love. Our secular culture tells us that if we don't feel loving, then don't try to pretend to love. Love, defined as feelings is kindergarten love. It requires absolutely no character, no commitment, no other-centeredness, no loyalty, no perseverance. Paul does not mean you can't love someone if you're acting out of your will, commitment, duty or because it's the right thing to do. What's left? Jesus says all you're left with is to "love those who love you."
3. The Greek word for "sincere" means "without wax." The meaning is illustrated with sculptors. If a statue was not made properly it could crack. If it cracked, the price went down. In order to sell the statue at full price, men filled the cracks with wax, then painted over it.
4. Paul calls us to is a love that is without cracks. "Aspire to the highest kinds of love, selfless love, sacrificial love, costly love, committed love, forgiving love, etc. This is a lifetime process!

Paul is giving us a lifetime goal to which we aspire.

5. When we are aware of "first me, then you," in our attitude, IN THE MOMENT, we are to turn away from self and refocus on the person in front of us.
 - Internally—keep purging that which blocks love: a critical heart; comparison; expectations, etc.
 - Externally, in action: push beyond your convenience. Love involves time, effort, cost, and sacrifice.
6. In light of this call, hate those evil things that get in the way of our kindness. Be superglued to what is good.

*Romans 12:10 **Be devoted to one another in love.** Honor one another above yourselves.*

7. If we are to pursue a better love, there must be a change about how we think about each other and ourselves. God is reversing what comes so easily for people, "First me, then you." The complete opposite can occur! "First you, then me!" Imagine the day-to-day change of how you would relate to your spouse, your parents, your neighbors, and the people at church!

*Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in love. **Honor one another above yourselves.***

11. We are to treat our brothers and sisters, like they were members of our actual family, with the same kind of tender affection. If we are flagging in our hearts in these ways, remember who we are ultimately serving. Reset our hope, don't get impatient and let our hearts run to Him in prayer. Help those in the church in need and have people from the church into your home.

12. Three big lessons from today! (1) We engage in a lifelong pursuit of a better love. (2) We are to be devoted to one another. (3) We are to honor each honor more than we seek our own honor.

13. What is your biggest take away from today?

DAY 3: Finding meaning by engaging with people. (vv. 11-13)

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

1. Paul moves from some big perspective teachings to some very specific applications.
2. There is a tendency to become very passive as a Christian. We believe in prayer and the sovereignty of God, but that does not mean we are to live passively. We are to live taking responsibility for a number of items! Under each of these items below, jot down your thoughts.
 - a. Never be lacking in zeal-

 - b. Keep your spiritual fervor

 - c. Serving the Lord-

 - d. Be joyful in hope-

 - e. Be patient in affliction-

 - f. Be faithful in prayer-

 - g. Share with God's people who are in need-

 - h. Practice hospitality-
3. A few thoughts...
 - a. In a world searching for personal meaning, these verses give great meaning to our lives. Each one of these directives points us toward experiencing our meaning.
 - b. To discover that meaning requires initiative.
 - c. Meaning is not an individual sport.
 - d. We find meaning as we initiate and engage with people in service, hospitality, and being a blessing.
4. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: Relating to “difficult” people (vv. 14-16)

1. Paul turns his attention too relating to “difficult” people.

Romans 12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

2. If you ever had doubt about only relating “true to your feelings,” this verse should blow that lie right out of the water! As you know, when someone persecutes you, you don’t feel “loving.” You feel like cursing. Paul gives this counter-intuitive directive. Bless them! It is to speak and act in a way that is for their good, no matter your feelings toward them!

3. To curse technically means to give something or someone over to destruction. To curse is to invoke God to destroy. In our culture when people spew, “God d*** you,” this is what they are actually requesting! To curse in a smaller way is to verbally abuse someone in a profane way.

*Romans 12:15 Rejoice **with** them that do rejoice, and weep **with** them that weep.*

4. The first part of this chapter reinforces the idea that we are united, not just in theology, but relationally. The two commands in this verse echo that standard. These principles give us two stunning gifts!

a. Happiness is shared and diffused among the many. Happiness shared multiplies itself. What strikes you about this truth?

b. Sharing our sorrows divides our sorrows! What strikes you about this truth?

5. These two truths produce the kind of profound connection for which we hunger.

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

6. Live in harmony with one another is an analogy. To harmonize with another means to listen and adjust yourself to the others who are singing. Seek to be on the same page with one another. Seek to serve God’s aims, not just your own.

7. Paul implies that we fail to do this when we are driven more by our pride than by God. The rest of the verse specifies examples of how pride can drive us.

8. Are we willing to love those people who give us nothing in return, who give us no status?

9. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: Relating to your enemies (vv. 17-19)

Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

1. There are few commands more difficult than not repaying evil for evil. We are very quick to retaliate, to deliver payback, or to take revenge.
2. That said, God doesn't just leave us with this command. He gives us four ways of thinking and action items when someone treats us with evil.

3. ITEM #1:

Romans 12:17 ...Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

What ultimately matters is your response, not the evil done to you! This is a very important focus-shift!

4. ITEM #2:

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

The ultimate goal is to be at peace with everyone, but as Paul insinuates, this is not always possible. What is possible is to do what you can, and leave the ultimate result to God.

5. ITEM #3:

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath...

This is an extraordinary truth. When we take revenge, no matter how justified we may be, people only get angrier at us. The anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God (James 1:20).

6. ITEM #4:

Romans 12:19... but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Human revenge is never enough. It is not enough validation and justice for you, nor is it enough punishment for the other person. As my mentor used to say, "God has a lot bigger Mr. Spanky Spoon than you do."

7. Enemies are not just the obvious people who want to take you down. Sometimes, "enemies" are those who treat you very badly. Sometimes, even those closest to you can feel like an enemy.
8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 6: The surprising power of the gospel to overcome evil (vv. 20-21)

Romans 12:20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1. This passage ends with a stunning paradox, and a completely unintuitive but redemptive command!
2. Winning over an enemy is ultimately not done by punishing evil. The human heart only gets angrier when retaliation is done to it, even if it is completely justified.
3. The evil human heart can only be redeemed when the person is treated with kindness when it knows it deserved retaliation.

The principle is simple: Undeserved kindness.

4. Paul gives two examples of someone's need, hunger and thirst. The broader principle is this: what need does my enemy have that I can meet with kindness? The application may be as broad as a physical need, a financial need, a relational need, etc.
5. One man I know mowed his neighbor's yard for him while the neighbor was on vacation. The man was stunned when he found out who had mowed his yard!
6. This may buy lunch for someone at work, or take a vase of flowers to work for someone.
7. The analogy of "*heaping burning coals on his head*," can be thought of as the potential to melt someone's heart, or the experience of redemptive shame, through an undeserved kindness.

Matthew 5:44 "Do good to them that hate you."

Romans 2:4 God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.

Romans 12:21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

8. The word "overcome" means to be vanquished or defeated.
 - a. What is this defeat? It is allowing the evil done to you to "justify" leaving the path of Jesus in order to retaliate. It is fighting fire with fire. It is stooping down to fight in the mud.
 - b. To not be defeated is to fight the urges in you to retaliate, and then to proactively be God's instrument to bring about the redemption of your enemy and the situation. It is the determination to be a light to the world regardless of the darkness around you.
9. One of the ways we learn to live this way is through a certain kind of community, that provides examples of this, and reinforces these very truths.

No human being flourishes in isolation. We need a certain kind of community.