

Three Loves of Life:
Eros
Song of Solomon 2:1-7

This morning we began a three-part sermon series on the loves of life. The word “love” When we say that we love someone, we can mean a multitude of things. There is an expression, “The Greeks have a name for it.” What this means is that the Greek language will have several words something for which we only have one word. That is certainly true of the word “love.” The Greeks have three words for love, *eros*, *philos* and *agape*.

When you say you love someone, it is helpful to know which of these kinds of love you are talking about. So, let me give you a quick and simple way of distinguishing between these three kinds of love: *Eros* says, “I love you for what you do for me;” *Philos* says, “I love you for what we do for each other;” and *agape* says, “I love you for what I can do for you.”

These are three very different kinds of love. You may not see the differences right away, but by the time we have looked at each of them, you will understand the differences.

This morning we will talk about *eros*. *Eros* is the love that says, “I love you because of what you do for me.” Now, when people hear the word *eros* the first thing they think of is romantic love. And romantic love is certainly one form of *eros*. People fall in love with each other because this very special person makes them happy. (Or, in the case of unrequited love, they think this is the only person in the world who could make them happy, if only they would love them.)

But there are many other people whom we love because they make us happy, other than a person we are “in love” with. I love my grandchildren because it feels so good to hold them and talk to them and play with them. I love Robin Williams, because he makes me laugh. I loved the Dallas Cowboys when Tom Landry was coaching them, because, more often than not, they gave their fans the thrill of victory and did it with class. I love the people who make Blue Bell Ice Cream, because...well, you know why. I love Christ, who frees me from my guilt and shame and gives me eternal life.

We have *eros* love for a great many people.

We even have *eros* love for things. You love your pets because they make you feel good, right? (At least that is true of dog owners. I’ve never quite figured out why some people love cats. It’s not *eros* love, because cats don’t do anything for anybody else.) I love my pick-up truck. I’ve had that truck since 1992, and every time I climb into it I feel good.

Eros is the grateful feeling we have for all those people (and things) who make our lives joyful, exciting, pleasant, satisfying and fun. It is a wonderful gift from God that gives life zest and joy. The more people you love with this kind of love, the happier you will be.

There are some problems with *eros* love. It is a self-centered love. It is the love we feel for people because of what they do for us. For the immature *eros* can and often does turn destructive.

For one thing, *eros* love is fragile. What happens when someone who used to make you happy decides they don’t want to make you happy anymore? Well, then you can write a Country and Western song about the one who doesn’t love you anymore. Last week I saw a list of the top Country and Western songs of all time. Number one is George Jones’ *He Stopped Loving Her Today*. That’s a song about a man who loved a woman who left him until the day he died. He

spent his life wishing that woman would come back and make him as happy as he had been with her. That's *eros* gone bad. When a relationship ends, whether it be a friend or a lover, let it go. Don't assume there is only one person in the world who can make you happy. God will send others your way who can make you just as happy or even happier. Don't long for happiness from those who no longer want to make you happy.

Then, *eros* love can go in the opposite direction. There are situations in which people want to keep making us happy, but they just can't.

At times I have loved the Astros. I don't love the Astros this year. They don't make me happy. They want to make their fans happy by winning ball games. They are certainly trying. But they just can't do it.

I know I'm being a fickle fan. Loving the team when they win and losing interest when they lose. But that's the way *eros* love is. It says, "You used to make me happy, but what have you done for me lately?"

Now, that's not so bad when you are talking about a sports team. But what if it's someone more important? Every pastor has had someone come to them and say, "I don't love my husband or my wife anymore." What they are usually saying is, "This person doesn't make me happy anymore."

Eros is a feeling. The one thing you can count on when it comes to feelings is that you can't count on them. Feelings come and go and come again. Any relationship which is limited to *eros* love will eventually fail. Sooner or later there will come a time when a person who used to make you happy will not make you happy.

What do you do when the thrill is gone? If you are mature, you continue to love that person with *philos* and *agape* love and wait for the fickle *eros* love to return. It almost always does. I have faith that even the Astros will make me happy again someday.

Another problem with *eros* love is that it can turn into worship. Worship is actually a form of *eros* love. When we worship Christ we have many of the same feelings that we have for someone we love romantically.

The scripture I used today comes from the Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon is a collection of ancient love songs. They are very romantic. In fact, some are quite suggestive. Yet, throughout its history, the church has used the Song of Solomon in its worship. I've sung gospel songs about the "rose of Sharon" and the "lily of the valley," both of which come from the Song of Solomon and are descriptions of a beautiful girl. But in these gospel songs we use them as a reference to Jesus. When the church uses the love songs from the Song of Solomon we simply change them from being the love of a boy and a girl to the love of Christ and the church. It works well. Love songs are love songs. That's why there have many religious songs that have been turned into pop love songs with just a few changes, and vice-versa. Worship is a form of *eros* love.

So, what is the difference between *eros* and worship? Just this: Worship is when we love with all our hearts. It's a matter of degree. Worship is complete and absolute *eros* love.

We should never love anyone or anything with all our hearts except God. People were not made to be worshipped. Loved—yes; worshipped—no. When we worship people or things, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment and we are making demands that are unreasonable. When we worship someone, we expect that person to make us happy all the time, from now on. We don't have the right to expect that of anyone but God.

We have no right to expect or demand that a human being make us happy all the time from now on. Or even every time we are together. When someone makes you happy, there

ought to always be an element of surprise to it. If someone makes you happy most of the time, or even some of the time, be grateful. Love them for it. But don't demand that they make you happy every day or every time you are with them.

Don't love anyone or anything with *eros* love with all your heart, except Christ. To do so is to break the first and most often broken of the Ten Commandments: Thou shalt have no other gods before me. The Bible talks about not loving anyone else more than God because God is a jealous God. But that's not the real reason. The real reason is that false gods are just that. They are false. God wants to save us from falling into false advertisement and investing ourselves in someone or something who is promising more than they can deliver.

God must come first in our lives. We need to constantly be applying the Isaac test to our priorities. You will recall that God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar. As much as Abraham loved Isaac, he was prepared to obey God. God stopped him at the last moment. God didn't really want Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. God wanted to know whom Abraham loves most—God or Isaac.

God doesn't challenge us to sacrifice the people we love. But here is the test we need to ask ourselves regularly: Is there anyone or anything that we would not be willing to leave behind if God asked us to do so? Is there anyone or anything that we love so much that we would say "no" to God?

If so, that is someone we love too much. And that relationship will turn toxic, poisonous, destructive to us and to the one love, because we are expecting and demanding too much from that person.

So, *eros* love can be a wonderful, joyful gift. It can also be disappointing and destructive. We keep *eros* healthy and joyful when we do three things:

Don't just love people for what they can do for you. Love them for what you do for each other and for what you can do for them.

Don't expect or demand that people make you happy. Be grateful when they do.

Don't love anyone with your whole heart but God.

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