

**JSL - Relationships Like Jesus:
March 23, 2022 [INTRO VIDEO - LOVE]**

Did you hear about the Minnesota Iowa war? **[1 Ole and Lena]**
Yeah. Minnesotans were throwing dynamite...
Across the Iowa border.

Iowans were lighting it...
And throwing it back.

What does that joke say about Minnesotans?

Speaking of Minnesota...
That reminds me of my favorite...
Ole and Lena jokes.

It's really short.
So get ready.

Ole loved Lena so much...
He almost told her.

What does that joke say about Norwegians?

That they are stoic.
That they don't easily share their feelings.
That they don't love?

Anyone here of Norwegian ancestry?
Anyone have some Norwegian blood....
Coursing through your veins?

How does that joke make you feel... really?
You may think it's funny...
On the surface... right?
But it's not nice.
Is it?

Of course not.
It's one of many artificial barriers...
We create in order to define ourselves..
Over and against other people...

Differentiate ourselves
Make ourselves...
Seem better
Feel better...
Look better...
In comparison... to other people.

So tonight is all about relationships. **[2 JSL]**
In order to live a Jesus Shaped Life...
We need to talk about how we live...

In relation to the people around us.
It's obvious that loving relationships...
Were a priority to Jesus.

There's a story about former President George HW Bush. **[3 BUSH]**
President George Bush the elder...
He died in 2018 at the age of 94.

Now because he had been a significant world leader...
There were all kinds of important people...
Who gathered and spoke...
At his funeral service...
To pay their respects...

And whether you agreed with his politics or not...
No one can deny that George HW Bush...
Was an influential figure in American and World history.

He served in World War II.
He was an aviator in the US Navy.
One of the youngest people to serve in that capacity.

He served in the House of Representatives...
And eventually the Senate.

He was appointed ambassador to the United Nations.
Under President Nixon.
He worked to develop foreign policy...
With both the Soviet Union and China...
During the Cold War.

He was the director of the CIA.

He was Vice President...
And was in that office...
When John Hinckley Jr...
Attempted to assassinate President Ronald Regan...

Later he was the Commander in Chief...
When the Berlin Wall fell...
And the Soviet Union dissolved.

He accomplished so many other things.
During his career.
And in his life.

Again... like I said...
Like him or not...
He was an important and powerful person.

However on his death bed...
He didn't seek out any of those world leaders...
He didn't mention his accomplishments...

Or the accolades he had received.
Over the years.

All those things he had done...
The people he had influenced...
The nations he had affected...
Didn't matter.

In the last moments of life...
His son came by his bedside...
His son who was also a former President.
And these two world leaders...
Were there together.
In that moment.

And before he died...
His father leaned over...
To his son...
And simply whispered.
I love you.

Out of all the things...
That could have been said...
All the wisdom that could have been passed...
All the secrets that could have been told.

Only one thing mattered. **[4 LOVE]**
In the end...
Love.

LOVE is at the core...
Of who Jesus was...
And what Jesus did...
And what it means for us to live a Jesus Shaped Life.

If we want to be followers of Christ...
Love is the distinctive characteristic...
Of what it means... to be like Jesus.

And you may think that sounds...
All happy and clappy...
Hallmark sappy.

Like love is equated with romance...
And all that stuff.

But love is actually...
More encompassing...
More difficult.
More controversial...
Than you might think.

For example.

There's a great story... in the Bible...
Of a woman... **[5 Woman at the Well]**
Who was rejected... and outcast...
By just about everybody.

The Jewish people thought she was unclean...
Because she was a Samaritan...
And those two nations...
Were bitter rivals.
Related to each other... but bitter rivals.

She was outcast by her own people...
The evidence being...
That she was gathering water...
At the local watering hole...
Literally a well...

In the heat of the noon day sun.
Doesn't make sense.
It's the wrong time of day.
Way too hot.

Unless you're avoiding other people.

And finally she was a woman.
Just one woman gathering water.
And if you were a man...
Especially...
A Jewish man...
At this time in history...
It would be inappropriate...
Scandalous...
And wrong...

To approach near this unattended woman.

But Jesus did.
Breaking every cultural norm...
That I just mentioned...
Jesus approached her...

He asked her for a drink.
But it was more than a drink.
He was reaching out to this woman...
Who had been rejected...
And outcast...
Just about on every level.
Of her existence...

And by speaking to her...
And engaging and arguing...
With this woman.

In a way... Jesus was being present in love.
She was not a pariah... to him...
He didn't see her...
As the human version of a plague...
To be avoided at all cost.

He was reaching out in LOVE.
That's what it looks like.

It looks like someone...
Who is willing to look past all the cultural garbage...
That surrounds another person...
And see them...
For who they really are.

Jesus was not supposed to talk to her.
Jesus was not supposed to be alone with a woman.
He was not supposed to affiliate with the unclean Samaritans.
He wasn't supposed to do anything he was doing.

He broke the Law of God...
By talking to her...
By taking the time...
To listen to her story...
And teach her about God.

SO WHY???

Why would he do it?
Because he loved her.
And she was more important...
Than maintaining the external law.

He wanted to give her the same hope...
The same opportunity...
The same love...
That he gave all people.

HIS LOVE MAKES NO DISTINCTION.

Another time...
Jesus gave us the summary...
Of the Law... and the Prophets.

Someone asked him...
If you had to pick...
The most important law...
What would it be...
What should we do... **[6 Love God/Love Others]**

Jesus said...
Love the Lord your God...
With all your heart and soul and mind and strength...

This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it.
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these TWO commandments hang...
All the Law and the Prophets.

The whole Old Testament.
The whole purpose...
Of God... dealing with us...
Can be summed up...
By these two simple statements.

Love God.
Love each other.
It could not be easier...
It could not be clearer.

This is the defining characteristic...
Of someone who chooses to follow... Jesus...

It's the one thing...
We can't avoid...
Or deny...
Or pretend...
Like it's not true.

It's at the heart of what we believe.
It's at the heart of God's being.
In the epistle of 1st John.
John writes...

God is love.
Everyone who loves is born of God...
And knows God.

Whoever does not love...
Does not know God...
Because God is love.

If we are the People of God.
And if God is... love.
Then we are... by definition...
People of love.

No excuses.
No apologies.
No exceptions.

And here's the trouble.
This is where our faith...
Gets really challenging.

It's easy to love...
The people we already love...
Our friends...
Our family...
And Good people...

But Jesus didn't ask us to **ONLY**...
Love our friends.

As a matter of fact...
He said... everybody loves their friends.
That's not a big deal.

He said...
If you are my follower...
You need to... **[7 Enemies]**
LOVE YOUR ENEMIES.
Which is so much harder.

I saw on the world news...
Last Friday...
PUTIN held a rally...
And in the course of this speech...
With all the people cheering...
And waving their flags.

He quoted the Bible.
This man... who has ordered...
And systematically invaded...
A neighboring country...

Bombing... killing...
Causing so much pain...
and death...
And loss...
And devastation...

He quoted the Bible...
God's Holy Word... and said...
There is no greater love...
Than to give you life...
For your friends.

There he was...
Using God's Word...
To drum up support...
For this unjust war.

Which makes me... as a pastor...
Who promised to be responsible...
For the right proclamation...
Of God's Word.
It makes me... Angry.

Because this is clearly a misuse...
Of the words of Jesus.
It is not what he meant... at all.

BUT.... With that said.

At the men's bible study last week...
We were talking about the war... the invasion...
In the Ukraine.

We were talking about what specifically...
We should be praying.
When one of the members of the group said...
We need to pray for PUTIN...
That he have a change of heart.
A change of mind.

If I am completely honest...
I don't want to pray for him...
I want to pray for...
The people of Russia to rebel against him.

I want to pray for...
The military forces of Russia...
To be defeated and humbled.

I want to pray for...
The people of Ukraine...
To return to their lives...

But Jesus told us to pray for our enemies.
The men of the Wednesday night Bible study...
Are right... and trying to be faithful...
To our God.

Because that's what Jesus told us to do.
Love your enemies.
Pray for them.

And that's what we are talking about...
When we focus on LOVE.

It's not always easy.
It's not always comfortable.

Love calls us...
To live faithfully...
In our relationships with each other.

And as long as we're digging into it tonight...
Might as well go a little further.

One of the most uncomfortable things...
We can do... to live out God's love...
Into our relationships... **[8 Forgiveness]**
Is forgive other people.

It's so much more empowering...
To hold a grudge...
To nurse our anger...
To be passive aggressive...
Toward someone who hurt us.

To hold onto the damage of the past...
And hold it over the heads...
Of the people who have done us wrong.
Like a guillotine...
Waiting to lop off their heads!

But Love (aka God) calls us to forgive.

Have you ever had to forgive someone?

Have you ever NEEDED to be forgiven...
For something you have said...
Or something you have done???

Well. It was a rhetorical question.
You have.

Somewhere along the way...
Someone hurt you.
And unfortunately...
Somewhere along the way...
You hurt someone else.

And that pain and hurt...
Is a burden...
That God does not want us to bear.

You remember what Jesus said...
Why he came into this world...
So that we may have life...
And have it abundantly...

It's not God's intention...
It's not Love's intention...
That we live our lives...
With heavy hearts...
Filled with hurt...
And frustration...
And anger.

We are meant to be free from sin...
And all the ramifications...

All the complications...
Of those broken relationships.

Listen. In the book of Acts Chapter 7... **[9 Stephen]**
We have the story of Stephen.
He was teaching and preaching about Jesus.
Trying to tell the people around him...
About the Love of God...

The people did not like his words.
It messed up their world view...
It threatened their core beliefs...
And made them angry...
To the point...
Of needing to shut Stephen up.

So... they gathered around him...
Picked up stones... off the ground...
And threw them at him...
Until he stopped breathing...

Now... you get the irony of this... yes?

He was proclaiming the Word...
Of the Lord of Love...
And the people responded...
With hatred and violence...

However... as Stephen was being martyred...
He looked up to heaven... and said...
Lord do not hold this sin against them.

In that moment...
Undoubtedly the darkest moment...
Of his life...

Stephen forgave the men who were killing him.

It is so counter-intuitive.
It makes more sense...
To fight back.
To lash out.
To meet hate with hate.
And fear with fear.

But he didn't.

SO where did he get the idea...
To respond that way?

When Stephen forgave those people...
Who were doing violence...
And taking his life...

He was echoing Jesus' words...
From the cross.
Remember? **[9b Jesus]**

After they beat him.
Stripped him.
Mocked him.
Broke him...
In body soul and mind.

They nailed him to the cross.
And Jesus said...
Father forgive them...
For they do not know
What they are doing.

Stephen not only lived a Jesus shaped life...
He died a Jesus shaped death.
He forgave those who persecuted him...
Just like Jesus forgave.

Forgiving others is love at work.
And often... it takes more strength...
Than we have on our own...
To extend forgiveness.

Especially when the offender...
Is not asking for forgiveness.

But we can pray...
We can ask God...
To give us the power...
From outside of ourselves...
To try to forgive as we have been forgiven.

BUT... I should clarify:

Forgiveness is not pretending that we were not hurt.
Forgiveness is not making excuses for the other person.
Forgiveness is not the same thing as reconciliation.

Forgiveness is releasing the right to get even.
Forgiveness means you don't need to hit back.
You don't need to make the other person suffer.
You don't need to even the score.
You can let go.
And say...
I'm done.

It's saying...
Yes you hurt me...
But I will not hurt you in return.
I will leave the scales unbalanced.

Forgiveness is ultimately UNFAIR.
It's choosing not to give the other person...
What they deserve.

But it's not a burdensome duty....
For those who want a Jesus shaped life;
Forgiveness is a path to freedom from bitterness.
We live among imperfect people...
So we all get hurt at times.

We need to learn...
How to move forward...
And how to live...
In freedom... and love.

Well.... That's about all I have to say tonight.

Just one more thing. **[10 Family]**
We are a family.
The Family of God.
A Family bonded together...
Not by blood.
Not by DNA...
Not by any other...
Outside means.

We are bonded together..
By the Love of God.
Which has been given to us.
Freely extended.
Even when we...
Didn't deserve it.

Thank you God.

But one thing about our family.
It's big.
It can be loud.
It makes mistakes.
Often it's complicated.

But our family...
Which is centered in Christ...
Who is centered in love.

Has the potential...
To be the greatest source...
Not just a great source...
But THE greatest source...

Of acceptance...
And life...

And healing...
In this world...

If only we choose...
To live A Jesus Shaped Life.