

## 40 Days of Love - Day 1

“The most important commandment,” answered Jesus, “is this: ...’Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Mark 12:29-31).

There was an old lady named Mrs. Nina Sweeney. She loved animals. She couldn’t stand to see the stray cats out in the Massachusetts cold, so she took them in. On the evening of the ninth of January, she had as her house guests, five stray cats and a puppy along with her own two cats and her dog. As time passed into the early morning hours of January 10<sup>th</sup>, Mrs. Sweeney was stricken with a terrible paralyzing illness. As the temperature dropped to below zero, the power went out in her little home.

Almost two full days later with temperatures still below zero, the neighbors missed her and walked in the cold to Nina Sweeney’s home and knocked on her door. All they could hear was the barking of dogs. They called 911, and the first responders were there in minutes. The medics quickly broke through the door, and in the bedroom, they found Mrs. Sweeney on her bed, warm as toast. One stray cat purred on each side of her head. Two others nestled up under her armpits next to her side. Her two cats lay across her legs, and her dog and the puppy lay across her tummy. The strays she had befriended kept Mrs. Sweeney from freezing to death.

There are those who have strayed from God and His church. Their hearts are cold toward God and are wandering aimlessly through life without faith in anything other than self. Have you cultivated a relationship with anyone like this? They are probably not aware as yet that they were created for relationships – with their Creator and with other people. Could it be – could it possibly be – that the ones we befriend and love who are not exactly like us might very well keep the church from freezing to death?

Senior Pastor, Mike Woods

## 40 Days of Love - Day 2

When I was in college, I served in the Student Government Association as a Sophomore Representative. One of my responsibilities was to oversee a large campus event. The position required much more time and effort than I ever imagined. Coordinating several campus groups was a daunting task. The planning, calendaring and implementation of the big weekend consumed me. My focus was on what “I perceived needed to be done”. This caused me to lose perspective, and my priorities got way out of line.

In my effort to accomplish great things, that is to make it the best event ever, my insecurities became evident. Every detail became an obsession for me. The fantastic team of people that were in place to help me became frustrated by my micromanagement approach. Students that I had great friendships with were negatively impacted by “MY” actions and lack of confidence in their leadership abilities. I had to ask forgiveness many times over the next months trying to rebuild broken relationships and restore our love for one another.

Jesus said: “So I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life-whether you have food, drink, and clothes. Doesn’t life consist of more than food and clothing?” (Matthew 6:25 NLT). As I reflect on these words, I am reminded that knowing, trusting and loving like Him is more important than anything this world has to offer.

May all of us learn to focus on Jesus Christ, love others like He did and trust Him with everything else.

Senior Associate Pastor, Alan Davis

## 40 Days of Love - Day 3

“Your Heavenly Father already knows your needs, and He will give you all you need from day to day, if you live for Him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.” Matthew 6:32b-33 (NLT)

This verse is a summary of the previous verses in Matthew 6 about worry. Google listed worry as giving way to anxiety or unease; allow one's mind to dwell on difficulty or troubles. But God says, “Don't worry, I already know when you need, and I will give you what you need from day to day.” Oh yea?? That's easy for God to say!! Well, in reality, yes, it is easy for God to say and do.

Remind yourself each day that he gave us life, full of personality, uniqueness, gifted to serve, and sustains you from day to day. He even holds the universe in suspension. Surely we can trust Him with our life and daily needs. Let me suggest two ways to help defeat worry and build trust and confidence in God:

First: As the verse encourages us, seek the Kingdom of God and live for him. Seeking the Kingdom and living for God are one in the same. The Bible, God's Words of instruction and comfort to us, must be our guide in our journey of life. Let each day begin with the desire and intention of putting into practice a principle or a verse of Scripture that day. An example would be, “Be kind to one another.” Or, “Forgive one another.” Or, “Love your enemies.” Or, “Guard your tongue.” Or, accept His personal invitation to “Come to Him, all of us who are weary, tired, and He will give us rest.” You won't completely understand God's Word, His promises, until you practice them, experience them. You see, understanding and developing trust in someone takes time and experience. Trust and obedience go together like peanut butter and jelly! “God blesses those who realize their need for Him” (Matthew 5:3).

Second: We must develop the art of living and serving God one day at a time. Living for Him, serving Him, is a life-long marathon, not a 100 yard dash. Day by day, God's will for our lives will begin to unfold within us as we utilize, put into practice, His instructions for our life. As we mature both in age and experience, our trust in God will grow stronger. We understand it, we get it, as we take God's Word and do something with it. Trust and obedience together will build our confidence in God, that He will provide for us ..... and He will meet our every need.

Don't worry ..... Be happy instead!!!

See you Sunday,

Executive Pastor, Dave Berryhill

## 40 Days of Love - Day 4

“Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”  
Matthew 5:6

‘Love the Lord with all my soul...hunger and thirst after righteousness’. These are 2 challenging statements. If I’m reading this correctly, it is saying that if I want to have a meaningful relationship with Jesus and receive His blessing, then learning how to love with my soul and how to hunger for His righteousness must become my top priorities.

I appreciate the author stating that my soul is the expression/passion of who I am, and that my soul is uniquely created by my God. He says that my expressed love for the Lord is like no other. Wow! Jesus is not expecting or looking for “cookie-cutter” love. He wants me and you to love Him with all our being, personality included. I really like that because sometimes I wonder if Jesus just smiles and pats me on the head like a little child, hoping one day I’ll know how to love Him more maturely. I’ve got a long way to go in that category. I’m very thankful that I am allowed, expected and encouraged to love my Lord with all my “unique” soul.

One way of expressing my unique soul love is living with hunger pains and thirst, not for food and water, but for His righteousness. The one food for which I hunger most is carrot cake. When the holidays approach, my thoughts turn toward this amazing delicacy. I feel fully blessed as I sit down to partake. Jesus tells us that we must hunger for Him in an even greater way, and as we do so, He will bless us plus fill us in a greater way. I don’t know about you, but I definitely want His blessings and filling.

Now that I’ve been reminded how, I’m renewing my commitment to love Jesus with all my soul by staying hungry and thirsty for all He offers.

See you Sunday,

Minister of Prayer & Recreation, Buddy Reeves

## 40 Days of Love - Day 5

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things" (Philippians 4: 8)

The Bible tells us to love God with all of our mind and strength. What goes in our minds is undetectable to other people, but God can read our thoughts continuously. We must be intentional every day to focus our minds toward Him through reading the Bible and spending time in prayer. When worry and anxiety tries to creep in our minds, we must break free from this bondage by affirming our trust in Jesus. We have to guard our thoughts diligently so we can draw near to Him.

God also promises to be our strength and shield. He plans out our days even before we get up in the morning and provides strength for each step of the way. So many times, we worry about how we are going to have the strength to carry on in the days ahead, but instead, we must focus on staying in touch with Jesus. If we refuse to waste our energy in worrying and focus on spending time with Him, then we will have strength to spare. God's presence is over us in all things and takes care of the known and unknown ahead.

If we place our trust and focus on Jesus, He will give us a clear mind and plenty of strength to face every day. Entrusting ourselves to His watchcase is the best security system available.

See you Sunday,

Minister of Preschool, Mary Wishon