

Live in the Light of Eternity

Play the Game with Grace

We're in this series called Live in the Light of Eternity. We are bringing the HOPE Jesus gives into our daily lives, because we really, really need God right now.

This pandemic is hard on all of us. Doctors, nurses, and first responders have seen so many sick and dying people these past few weeks that they are heartbroken. They are going through the trauma that soldiers in combat experience. They are suffering from PTSD emotionally, while trying to stay well physically.

So many are lonely, isolated from their family and friends now. This is Mothers' Day and my 89-year-old mother canNOT be with or receive gifts from anyone in her family today. She lives in a senior apartment residence where covid-19 has claimed 7 lives, so no one can go in. Unfortunately, her story is not the rare exception, but a common reality this year. Many YOU are isolated from the people you love.

Many – maybe you – are hurting financially, worried about keeping a roof over your head and bread on your table.

These things and more, are affecting ALL of us, and most people are stopping and reevaluating their lives. Our priorities are changing. We are valuing things less, and treasuring people more.

If you've been with us these past weeks, you know that we've been comparing your life to playing a game of Monopoly. And on this Mothers' Day, we stop to think about people dear to us. And it



may surprise you that the # 1 strategy tip to playing Monopoly, has nothing to do with getting a lot of money, instead it's all about your relationship with the people nearest to you.

The # 1 tip for playing monopoly is this: ***“Be the kind of player other people want to sit next to at the game. Be the kind of player other people don't mind losing to.”*** ~ “Mr. Monopoly”, Monopoly Strategy Tip #1

Monopoly is a game that cannot be won without trades and deals, and that takes cooperation with others. Other players don't like to lose to insulters, and know-it-alls.

Like I said, life is a lot like Monopoly. In life, people who cling to resentments, people who do not know how to handle disappointment with grace, people with long memories of grudges, people who choke on the words "I'm sorry," people who sulk, and pout, and whine - end up as losers in life.

Be the kind of player other people want to sit next to. The Bible's word for this is: grace. Play with grace. Live with grace. Have a gracious spirit towards other people.

Nothing Else Matters. In today's first Scripture lesson we heard God guide Paul to write that playing the game of life with love for others is THE # 1 strategy tip. Paul said that without loving others, he was nothing. He said, loving others is more important than lots of other spiritual accomplishments.

"¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3

The same is true for any other accomplishments in life. If I make a fortune, get the cover of *Time* magazine, become attractive, comfortable, and secure – but have not love, I roll snake eyes. No matter how much I win, if I win it *ALONE*, I lose. Love is THE ball game!

Take a moment and poke yourself in the bellybutton. Our navel is a constant reminder that we all started life connected to another human being. God created us as relational people.

God Created You love others. Loving other people, is not just a side game. It is THE game – it's everything. God created you to be in His image. And the main characteristic about God is NOT

what He's done, it is what God IS. "God IS love." God made the world and the universe – and you – to be the objects – the receivers -- of His love. And He created *you* in His image – to love God and give love to the people He has placed around you.

Les Parrot has this to say about friendship from the book *Relationships*:

Friends make the ordinary--running errands or eating lunch, for example--extraordinarily fun. Good friends ease our pain and lighten our heavy load....Not only are friends good for the soul but for the body as well. Friends help us ward off depression, boost our immune system, lower our cholesterol, increase the odds of surviving with coronary disease, and keep stress hormones in check. A half dozen top medical studies now bear this out. The thing that mattered most was friends. What's more, research is showing that you can extend your life expectancy by having the right kind of friends.

This raises a question. How well are you doing in your relationships?

Relationships aren't always great. Because of sin.

Without God, relationships with other people can only go so far & no farther. Even **Bert & Ernie** don't get along most of the time! The reason is, without God's love in us, we don't have His love to give.

The cause for this is sin. At the beginning, people were designed and created to be in relationship with God and with each other. God intended that we be friends – close, loving, self-sacrificing friends.

But, We broke our relationship with God. Refused to love Him back. As a result of this self-centeredness, break relationships with other people too.

The problem is deep down inside of us. It is in our hearts and souls. And God holds us accountable. We don't deserve to be in any kind of a relationship with God – now or forever.

But God created you not only TO love others, but to RECEIVE His love. God created you to receive His love. God has loved you, even when you didn't love Him, and even when you don't love other people as He asks you to. He loves you so much, that Jesus gave His life for you. This is what Jesus said:

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” John 15: 13-15

We've messed up so much, that we CAN'T start up a relationship with God. But that didn't stop God. Here's the awesome part -- God chose you. ***“You didn't choose me, remember, I chose you.”*** John 15:16

You can't earn your way into a relationship with God. You can't try to convince your way into this relationship. God wants you to be in a close, loving, relationship with you, JUST because He loves you!

And the WAY that God makes this happen is THE CROSS! Here's what God says in the Bible: ***“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*** John 15:13 God's move to make you His friend was an act of love, when He laid down His life to bring you into a relationship with Him.

In another place God says: ***There is only one God. And there is only one go-between for God and human beings. He is the man Christ Jesus.*** 1 Timothy 2:5 (NIRV) Jesus, is the go-between, He's the One who brings us together with God.

J. L. Packard: ***“There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me. There is, certainly, great***

cause for humility in the thought that He sees all the twisted things about me that my fellowmen do not see, and that He sees more corruption in me than that which I see in myself. There is, however, equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that, for some unfathomable reason, He wants me as His friend, and desires to be my friend, and has given His Son to die for me in order to realize this purpose."

And, God's love, through Jesus -- won't go away -- you can count on Him. **"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** *Hebrews 13:5* No matter WHAT you're going through in life, you can count on Him!

Because of God's love for YOU, you can **Love others, in Jesus' name.**

Love each other as I have loved you." John 15:12 Love each other with God's kind of love. His love is self-sacrificing. Love that's always freely given. Always for the benefit of the person receiving the love.

Because of God's love filling you, You love other people with God's kind of love. **Love each other as I have loved you."** Jesus said. His love is different. His love is Self-sacrificing. Always freely given. Always for the benefit of another person.

This kind of love for others STARTS with the people who are closest to you -- in your family, and among other Christ-followers, in the Church. Among people who have RECEIVED God's love, we should be able to GIVE love the BEST. Among Christ-followers, there is a depth of God's love that is just deeper.

The COMMUNITY -- that is, the relationships with each other -- within the Church, between Christ-followers *is just different!* That difference is God's love, shared with each other.

Larry Crabb writes, **"A central task of community [that is relationships between believers in the Church] -- is to create a place that is safe enough for the walls to be torn down, safe enough for each of us to reveal our brokenness"** (Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, p. 11).

That is our hope and our goal for all of our relationships among us. Now, how does all this play out in real life?

Christ-followers share:

1. Instead of stinginess, they share PHYSICAL HELP. Food, clothes, money, service.
2. Instead of stubbornness, they share SPIRITUAL HELP. Comfort, praying, teaching, encouraging.
3. Instead of bitterness, they share FORGIVENESS.
4. Instead of despair, they put into words the hope and FAITH Jesus gives.

In today's Gospel reading we heard Jesus say it this way: ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last."*** *John 15: 16a* That FRUIT that Jesus talks about here, is inviting other people to get to know for themselves, the kind of love we ourselves have received in a personal relationship with Jesus. So we pour our lives into loving other people – family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors – and then we Invite them to know God's love too.

Now, How do we do this *practically*? How do we be the kind of player others want to sit next to?

Make space for relationships. We cannot MAKE friendship and love happen. Relationships come, when they come at all, as gifts. BUT, we can make space for them.

Instead of eating alone, go out to lunch with co-workers routinely. Invite neighbors over for a barbeque at least once per month. As a family, sit down to dinner together and talk. Turn off the TV. Set your phone down when another person is in the room so you can look at that person in the eye and engage in conversation. Read together. Simply – make relationships a TOP PRIORITY in how you spend your time.

Help somebody else win. The Bible says: ***"Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*** *Philippians 2: 3-4*

In the real game of life, our most memorable and cherished wins happen when we are helping somebody else.

All of the 10 Commandments have this as their point. "Don't steal," but help somebody else win by keeping their stuff and their

job. “Don’t kill,” but help somebody else win by caring people who need food, clothes, or medical help.

Lose with Grace. Losing happens to *everybody*. How to lose is one of life’s most important lessons. Losing well, is an art that requires all the grace we got. It means learning how to say “congratulations.”

Win with Grace. We live in a time of End-zone celebration dances. When I win, I am tempted to brag about how good I am, be arrogant, be insensitive to others, and want to re-live my successes over, and over, and over again – *LONG* after anyone wants to hear it again. Graceful winners, always remember what it feels like to lose. And their LOVE for other people, is stronger than their own win.

Forgive with Grace. When you play the game, you may win or you may lose, but for certain, you will be wounded. And to deal with that hurt, you need that greatest kind of grace available – the grace to forgive.

See, the **ONLY** way we can love – and forgive – is **BECAUSE** of the cross. Love is possible only at the cost of the cross. The Bible says:

“¹⁹We love because He first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

1 John 4: 19-21

Love comes at the price of the death of God’s Son. That’s how much it cost for my forgiveness.

At the cross, you receive the ultimate forgiveness, purchased at the ultimate price from heaven.

At the cross we see what grace looks like at a time of ultimate loss.

At the cross we learn to lose with grace.

At the cross was ultimate victory. We learn to win with grace.

At the cross we see what grace looks like when it loses, when it wins, when it forgives. And people are still hoping to sit next to someone who is like that.

Amen.