

RADICAL LOVE

PART 1: LOVE IN ACTION

As we begin to look at the idea of radical love, it's important to realize that it does not begin with our hands and feet and what we do. Instead, showing radical love begins with considering God's radical love for us. This is not a one-time commitment—it's a decision we make every single day. God knows everything about us and still loves and pursues us. He sent His Son to die for us while we were still haters of Him. Our radical love for others should be a response to the amazing love God shows us.

QUESTION: *What does the word 'grace' mean to you?*

We use the word 'grace' so often in the church that we no longer truly understand what it means and how radical it truly is. Take, for instance, the situation of getting pulled over for driving faster than the speed limit. If the officer writes a ticket, that is justice. If, instead, the officer lets the driver off with a warning, we might call that grace. However, that is simply mercy. Grace is so irrational that it would be like the officer not issuing a ticket and also giving the driver everything he has! Grace doesn't make sense. God's love is truly radical.

► Read Luke 5.17–20.

Although only in the 5th chapter of Luke, the buzz about Jesus has already spread enough that a large crowd had gathered at the house where He was with His disciples and some religious leaders. In another part of town, a group of four or so men had gathered around a paralyzed man. They had heard about Jesus, had maybe even heard Him speak, and they were compelled to DO something. It wasn't enough to just sit around, think and discuss. They took action even though they didn't have all the answers.

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Love becomes that much more tangible when there are actions that correspond with good theology. Rather than just focusing on the idea of something, we should take that which we're convicted about and ask God to give us the courage to do something.

QUESTION: *What do you have strong convictions about? What hurdles have kept you from taking action to follow up those convictions?*

In the culture of Jesus' time, the paralyzed man in the passage would have been seen as not just physically challenged, but also as spiritually unclean. Jesus took care of the whole person when he forgave his sins and healed his body. There is so much brokenness in our world today, but it goes much further than just the physical issues of hunger, poverty, trafficking, etc. Mother Teresa said, "I have come

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to realize more and more that the greatest disease and the greatest suffering is to be unwanted, unloved, uncared for, to be shunned by everybody, to be just nobody to no one.” To show radical love, we must show people that they have dignity and worth. We must care for their inner selves as well as their physical bodies.

There are five things we can learn from these men who took the paralyzed man to Jesus.

1. THEY HAD A SPIRIT OF FAITH.

While we don't know much about these men, we can easily assume that they were not religious leaders. These were just regular people who had heard about Jesus and been changed. They saw the paralyzed man, knew he had value in God's eyes and had faith that Jesus was worth bringing him to.

Nowadays, one of the biggest barriers to people living a more missional life is not having all the answers to questions people might ask. We don't need all the answers, we just need to have faith that people matter to God. If we truly believe that we matter to God and are created in His image, then it easily follows that others are created in His image and matter to Him as well.

QUESTION: *When have you found yourself without all the answers in a spiritual discussion? Is there a particular topic that you're most nervous about? How would focusing on the fact that people matter to God help in those situations?*

2. THEY HAD A SPIRIT OF COMPASSION.

Compassion simply means to care. For some of us, we need to begin by praying for God to help us care about the things He cares about.

For years, people were walking past the paralyzed man. We don't know the other men's relationship to him, but on that day they were convicted and compelled to act and carry him to Jesus. Throughout His miracles, we see that Jesus looked people in the eye. He communicated that He saw them and that they had worth. Radical love begins when we have a heart for compassion.

3. THEY HAD A SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION.

These men worked together. The Christian life is not meant to be a solo act. We need to put to rest any hero or messiah complex that we may have. Our mission is not the great mission, God's is. Our prayer should be to be part of whatever God is doing. We are meant to work together. God never speaks His vision in isolation to only one person—He confirms it through others. An East African proverb says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Radical love is not about one person doing it alone. The church is not meant to be an event. It is a group of people who worship, serve God and are on mission together.

QUESTION: *How are you involved in Christian community? What does it look like for you to be involved in God's mission with others?*

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4. THEY HAD A SPIRIT OF PERSEVERANCE.

Life is hard. Even when we're following God's vision everything is not rosy. We can see that in any number of stories from the Bible. There is often a false illusion about the glamour of radical love. Some may even think it will lead to fame, glory, health and wealth. The truth is, we are called to be faithful. When we choose to live as disciples of Christ, it will mess us up.

The men in the story had to work to carry the man to Jesus. It certainly wasn't easy and the idea was probably better than the reality. Yet, they persevered.

In our age there is a greater degree of brilliance and creativity than ever before. But do we have the perseverance and tenacity it takes to push through setbacks?

5. THEY HAD A SPIRIT OF CREATIVITY.

Upon arriving to the house where Jesus was, the men discovered that they couldn't get in. The story could have

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ended here and would've have still been a good story about men who tried to help a paralyzed man. But they were not so easily dissuaded. They got creative.

Our culture, society and language is constantly changing. We cannot keep doing what we've always done if we want to reach our world. Our God is creative and He has made us creative to help us reach the world for His glory.

QUESTION: *In what ways do you see creativity helping to draw others to Christ? In what ways do you think the church could improve in this area?*

Finally in verse 20 it says, "When Jesus saw their faith, He said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'" The faith and tenacity of these men was rewarded when the paralyzed man was not only healed but also forgiven.

Our lives, our works and our neighborliness matters. We are not just a statistic, it matters how we live our lives. When we engage in radical love, we will be changed. It is not only about serving others, it is also about us being changed. We have so much to learn as we engage in radical love.

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