

With...

Being With Someone for the Rest of Your Life
Feelings...
Proverbs 4:23
February 26, 2017

If you've been with us for the past few weeks you know that we have been talking about relationships. We've been looking at some of the key things that are fundamental to all relationships. The first week we've looked at the word love and we established that love is a verb. Many of us act like love is a noun. We talk about falling into and out of love like it's a location. But, we established in our first week that Jesus changed that thought process 2000 plus years ago. Jesus told us that we are to love – verb – one another. Jesus didn't tell us to step into love and step out of love with people. Jesus told us that we are to love one another. So, say this with me..."love is a verb."

Good. The second week we looked a little closer at what Jesus meant by that. We looked at a passage that talked about how Jesus made love a verb and we discovered that it included things a lot of us don't like. Jesus said that if you and I are going to make love a verb, then we are going to need to value other people more highly than we value ourselves, that we are going to have to submit to others so that they know we love them. Because you cannot have it both ways. You cannot have everything your way and live out love as a verb because love as a verb means you do things that may not interest you, and you surrender your way because you want the other person to have what they want. Jesus did this very kind of thing for us by leaving heaven and coming to not just live on earth in human skin but, to die a horrible death in our place, rise again from the dead, and set the world free. He did all of that for us...because love is a verb, it's something you do and you do it in ways that let the other person know that they are valuable.

So, this morning we are going to talk about something that gets in the middle of this idea Jesus has about love. We are going to look at one of the major inhibitors to our ability to love others – our friends, our family members, our fiancé, our spouse – and it's something every one of us struggles with. And it's something God gave you to use for good but, we let it mess with our ability to love because it's a big deal and it's hard to do this thing called love. Are you ready to hear what it is? It's our feelings. Our feelings are responsive and strong and powerful in everyone's life. **We all have feelings.** You're having feeling right now (I'm not sure I want to know what they are but, you're having feelings right now, right).

So, how are we going to look after our feelings so that our relationships are positive and loving relationships...and that's where some of us say Dave, don't ask me to go there. Some of us in this room have had our feelings crushed, some of us have been abused in ways that I will never understand, some of us here today have had to push down feelings for a long time and others have spent hours with a counselor and a lot of money to get where you are today. So, hear me when I say that I am not going to ask you to go against those feeling. What I am going to ask you and everybody else in this room to do is to seriously think about how we are going to love like Jesus with some of the pain and the hurt we have inside. **Jesus has called us to love others like he loved us**, right...so, how are we going to do that.

Turn in your Bibles or on you App's to a passage in Proverbs that is going to help all of us look at our feelings and how we love. Together, we're going to see if we can't do this better. Because, it is sad that there are people who can't move forward because of the pain. It's sad that the feelings we have about our ex's – our ex-friends, our ex-fiancés, our ex-spouse are so strong that they can keep us from loving the way Jesus has asked us to love. So, turn with me to Proverbs 4:23 and look at what it says:

23 Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. (NLT)

Now we know something today that they knew back then – when this passage is being written, we know what he's talking about when he says "guard your heart," because for thousands of years we have used the term "heart" to talk about our feelings. We say things like, "he broke my heart, she broke my heart" or "my heart is aching" or "oh, bless her heart." And what we know today that they knew back when Solomon was writing this (almost 3000 years ago) was that the physical, beating muscle that is sitting in your chest is not the heart he is talking about, is it? No, he is talking about our feelings. He is talking about what people for thousands of years have referred to as the seat of our feelings or our emotions, right. We all know that so, when he says, "guard your heart" he's not talking about Kevlar chest protection, he's talking about our feelings.

This is something we all need to learn. As children, we will love and trust people until they prove us wrong. And after a while we will build up a resistance to certain actions or certain people or certain situations because our feeling tell us to back away or back out or run. I know you understand what I mean because statistically we have some common aversions to things like used car salesmen, or other people in professions that we think are slimy. And I find it amazing that some of us can have so much hate for certain people in our lives. I know people who stood up in front of God and said yes to each other who cannot stand to be in each other's presence for more than the time it takes to transfer the kids for custody time. Over time and through the events that happen in our lives we build calluses and protective coverings over our feelings...usually so that we won't get hurt.

But, if we're are going to love like Jesus loves then we need to discover what this passage is saying, because it is not saying "never love again." It is saying, guard your heart. What that means is that **we need to pay attention to our hearts**. We need to take care of our hearts and the things we let in and the way things happen in our lives. Some of us have been pretty haphazard about the things we've allowed to happen to our hearts. Others of us have been reckless at times, haven't we, and our hearts got broken. And we are carrying that hurt with us today. It may not be obvious to most people but, it's in there. And there are times when something triggers those feelings and that hurt gets opened up again and it's a bit like Pandora's Box, isn't it? All kinds of nastiness come out before we realize what just happened. Those feelings, that hurt, that emotional upchucking, happens because that's what's inside of us. It's in there, inside of you and me and given the right situation and the right trigger and BOOM, world war three starts happening. Unless, you've learned to guard your heart.

But, here's the problem...we're not very good at guarding our hearts. We're good at monitoring behavior but, this is a heart issue more than it is a behavior issue. We think that if I can control the situation and behaviors of others, if we can manipulate the environment, if we can avoid the triggers, and manage our feelings then we can make sure that we're going to be okay, that our feelings won't be hurt. But, that's not what Solomon, the guy who's known as the wisest man in the word, that's not what he's talking about. He's not talking about control, or avoidance, or manipulating...those are not healthy ways that we guard our hearts, those are ways that we are monitoring behavior in hopes that nothing will happen that comes close to the things that have happened before, that broke our hearts.

So, trying to control or manage people or situations is a way that we try to protect our emotions. After all, relationships have a lot of emotions wrapped up in them, right. And most of us want to get good, emotional stuff out of our relationship so that we feel good. And we get tired of the stuff that drains us. We get tired of the stuff that makes us feel lousy that our friends or our fiancé or our spouse just keep doing. And the temptation is to just run away. And the problem with that is that you will take the same emotional requirements into the next friendship or the next marriage if you don't learn how to do what Solomon says...to guard your heart. Now, at this point some of you are thinking that it's time to put up a barbed wire fence, post sentries, put up spot lights and flood lights around your heart because you think that guarding means not letting anyone or anything in. That's not what he means. What he means is that we need to stay on top of the feelings and condition of our hearts. **By guarding our hearts means we need to do ongoing checkups on our feelings**. It's like doing regular checkups on our cars more often than we do with our hearts. We check the oil, the air in the tires, we get inspections done when they're due, and when the car starts making a funny noise we take it to someone who can figure out what's wrong. But, for most of us, when something happens emotionally or something happens that affects the way we feel we do what...nothing, right? We don't talk about it, we brush it under the rug, we wait to see if it will happen again, we call mom. Okay, maybe you don't call mom but, oh, there are some mom's in the room who are saying, oh yeah, they do call.

So, here's what I want you to do and this is a key to staying *with* someone, staying with a friend, staying with that person you're falling for, staying with your spouse. There are a few things all of us can do to guard our hearts. The first thing we can do is think before we speak. Think about what you're feeling before you "blaagh" all over the person who may have just hit the trigger. Think about the things you are feeling and own them. And let me just say this...they are your feelings. The other person did not put them inside of you they were already there. So, don't blame the person for the feelings...cause this is what we do, we say things like, "you make me so angry." And the other person might look at us and say, "what, what did I do?" So think, what is it you're feeling. And look, there are no bad feelings. They are our feelings. So it's better to say something like "when this happens", or "when you do that, I feel this way."

So, what are some of the ways we feel, exactly. Are you feeling jealous, are you left out, embarrassed, unappreciated, ugly, unloved, failure, old, stupid, lonely, abandoned, scared, out of control, betrayed, picked on, or disrespected. What exactly is it that I'm feeling. I'm looking after my heart, I'm doing a diagnostic check and this is what I'm feeling.

And **when we name the emotions that are going on we can begin to deal with them** so that we are guarding our hearts from the ugly ooze that can build up in our there if we keep pushing it down or ignoring what's happening to us on the inside. Look with me at what Jesus says:

¹⁶ "Don't you understand yet?" Jesus asked. ¹⁷ "Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. ¹⁸ But the words you speak come from the heart—that's what defiles you. ¹⁹ For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. ²⁰ These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you." Matthew 15:16-20 (NLT)

Look at what **Jesus says, this is a heart issue**. He is saying that what comes out of us comes from our hearts. And if we don't pay attention, when we don't feel or think before we shout or say something, ugly – things can happen, bad things can be said, feeling can be crushed and relationships broken forever. If we can do the heart check that Solomon says we should all be doing we will have healthier friendships, healthier relationships, and healthier marriages. If we stay on top of our feelings we guard against the kinds of evil that can come out of our mouths, that started in our hearts.

Now, this is not going to be easy. It is going to take some thoughtfulness on our parts. We are going to have to stop and think before we speak. We are going to have to stop and evaluate why we're feeling the way we are and exactly what those feeling are inside of us. Feelings are tricky things and if we can be honest with each other, feelings are not trustworthy. They can trick us, fool us, throw us off course, give us false readings and lead in directions God doesn't want us to go. If we're going to guard our hearts, we will need to put our feeling under the microscope before we give them the steering wheel of our lives.

Guys, we can do this but, it is going to be tough because most of us are taught to be tough or that feeling are not valid for us. The truth is we have feelings too. And while they say that this tends to be a little easier for women because they are by-in-large more in touch with their feelings, we have the same need to guard our hearts. Our friendships, our marriages need all we can give and guarding our hearts is a key to a great friendship or a great marriage.

So, imagine if you did this, what would your life look like? What would your relationships look like, what would your conversations look like, what would your romantic moments look like? God is interested in our hearts and what is happening there. If we are going to learn to live *with* each other better than before then ask yourself...what would my life looked like if I took the time to guard my heart in every relationship I have?