

“STRESS2REST: RELATIONSHIPS”  
by Rom A. Pegram (6/21/20)

Good morning ... and HAPPY FATHER’S DAY to all the dads joining us for worship today! We wish you a very happy Father’s Day and that you’ll know the kind of LOVE we’re talking about today...

Folks, we’re finishing up with our Stress2Rest worship series today; and we’ll be covering the #5 stressor among church people: RELATIONSHIPS! We’ve talked about the stresses of ... OUR FUTURE, OUR FINANCES, OUR JOBS, OUR FAITH ... and, now, RELATIONSHIPS. Is there anyone here who wouldn’t agree that relationships involve stress from time to time? Well, Gene & Marge Junger may be an exception, but for the rest of us ... I think that’s true. Relationships *can* be stressful! So how do we, as followers of Christ, get better at relationships—in a way that will lower the stress in those relationships? We’re going to look at that. But first let’s look at our morning scriptures (Matthew 11:28-29, Proverbs 3:5-6, John 13:34)...

**Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. – Matthew 11:28-29 (NLT)**

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup>Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. – Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)**

**So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. – John 13:34 (NLT)**

Let me say this, as we begin today: The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your relationships. (Repeat.) You could be killing it in other areas of your life, but you’re going to be absolutely miserable (and stressed) if your relationships aren’t going well. Again, the quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your relationships...

But, here’s what I want to tell you today: *When it comes to LOVE and your relationships, you cannot listen to culture!* Culture will describe LOVE, for instance, in a variety of ways ... but they don’t even come close to God’s definition of LOVE—the One who created us to love! And, for us, a part of it is our English language. Do you know how many words the English language has for LOVE? ... If you guessed ONE, you are absolutely correct! LOVE. That’s it. And then it’s up to us to figure out what that word means in a variety of situations. But, if you consider other languages—Biblical (Koine) Greek, for instance, has about six different words for LOVE! You don’t have to ‘figure out’ what the word means in a variety of situations, because their language does it for you. Let me show you (and I’m only going to give you a few). Here are...

**3 Greek Words for Love:**

- **PHIL<sup>1</sup>IA:** It's the root word in an American city; can you guess which city that is? Philadelphia, right! And Philadelphia is 'The City of ... what?' Brotherly love. That's what 'philia' describes—brotherly love (i.e. good friends, etc.)...
- **EROS:** This is romantic/physical love. This is the root of the word 'erotic.' And, just for your information, it's the only one of these words NOT mentioned in the New Testament. And finally...
- **AGAPE:** It's the highest level of LOVE and refers to God's unconditional love for us! Agápe is unconditional, God-like, selfless love. It represents the kind of love God has for us & the kind of love we *want* to have for each other...

It's GREEK; so, there it is ('MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING?')... But, *why are we doing a word study?* Because the New Testament, where God's word describes LOVE for us, was originally written in this language. We need a deeper understanding of what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians (our definition of LOVE) and how that needs to look in our lives ... if we want the STESS of RELATIONSHIPS to go down. So, let's jump in, folks. What we need are...

### **TRUTHS ABOUT LOVE THAT WILL LOWER YOUR STRESS (4):**

And it will be a study on the best description of God's love I know of, from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 13, and Verses 4-7 (NLT):

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. <sup>6</sup> It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. <sup>7</sup> Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance." So, *first...*

**LOVE IS ... A CHOICE.** 1 Corinthians 13:4-5a, again, tells us: "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud <sup>5</sup> or rude."

So, the whole idea of 'love is a choice' kind of flies in the face of the idea of 'falling in love.' It's a popular notion ... but not necessarily God's idea. When you 'fall' for something' (i.e. fall in a hole, fall for a prank, etc.), it sounds like something you couldn't help doing. Once you 'fall in love,' you can't get out! You're stuck whether or not it's a healthy relationship, whether or not that person helps draw you closer to God, or not. If you've fallen, you 'just couldn't help it'...

Folks, contrary to how the world describes it, LOVE is not something you fall into! It's something you CHOOSE! It's a choice that, hopefully, leads to loving actions. Saying love is a choice doesn't diminish the power of love; *it elevates it* ... because love isn't something that 'just happens.' It's chosen...

Now this world will tell you it has to do with feelings. Feelings come first. But seriously ... the feelings of LOVE always follow actions of love (a choice). That's when the feelings come. But, seriously, a feeling can lead you against the biblical truth of

God's love ... but when you choose, you evaluate the relationship through God's eyes. Through God's eyes, you choose to either step toward another person ... or step away from that person. You decide whether that relationship honors God or whether it doesn't honor God. Here's a good definition of LOVE for you: Love is a careful and deliberate journey with another person towards God. It's a choice. One of the biggest points of 1 Corinthians 13 is that ... love isn't a feeling! And it's not a one-time choice either! It's a choice in a relationship that you have to make every single day! You have to choose to love another, even when you don't *feel* like loving them!

When I officiate at weddings, I will usually remind the couple that they're not just saying they love one another today, but they're committing to choose to love one another every day for the rest of their lives—even when they don't feel like loving one another. It's a choice we make over and over and over again—sometimes when we don't feel like doing it. Feelings aren't very trustworthy, are they? LOVE has to be a rational decision...

Look again with me at 1 Corinthians 13:4-5a where it says this: "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud <sup>5</sup> or rude." Paul starts out this description of LOVE with 'patience and kindness.' And those two things are highly underrated, if you think about it. 'Patience and kindness' have the power to transform any relationship we're in! They can move us ... from STESS to REST in our relationships! And, considering all that we're experiencing in our world today, let me also say this—applicable to every relationship we're in ... LOVE DE-ESCALATES! And that, folks, lowers stress. Not to mention cutting out 'jealous or boastful or proud or rude.'

But here's the point: LOVE is not based on emotions or feelings. Emotions fade; emotions vacillate. *LOVE, however, is a choice I make—shown by the actions I take.* And it's a choice I make time after time after time—never just once... Here's another truth...

**LOVE IS ... A COMPROMISE.** 1 Corinthians 13:5bff says of LOVE—"It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged." OUCH!! Love is ... learning to be less selfish and not always be like 'my way or the highway!'

Comedian Rita Rudner once said, "I love being married; it's so great to find that one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life!" In our humanness, there's some truth to what Rudner says. And that's why COMPROMISE is so important ... because there's no such thing as a conflict-free relationship, which is why STESS is often involved...

C.S. Lewis says "PRIDE is the ultimate root of all sin." And it's because of our pride in relationships that we cling 'to our rights' and we have to have our own way—that's pride. Pride says, 'Listen, it's not fair if I don't get what I want. It's my right.' And that, folks, is root cause of every conflict and fight in the history of the world. Again, this is why COMPROMISE is so important!

Again, 1 Corinthians 5 tells us, “[LOVE] does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.” OUCH!! Pride cannot be in control; only LOVE will help you compromise. *Do you want to be right ... or do you want to be happy?* There’s the question...

And, by the way, compromise is very rarely a 50/50 deal. Sometimes it’s a 100/0 deal. If something is important to Jane, it’s important for me to realize that ... and lean toward what she wants. If I will be willing to do that, if it’s something that’s important to me, guess what? Jane will probably lean my way. LOVE is ... a COMPROMISE. And next...

**LOVE IS ... UNCONDITIONAL.** 1 Corinthians 13:7 reminds us, “Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” What this means is this: Love isn’t subject to circumstances or a good mood or a bad mood or whatever is going on in a tough situation; it means ‘I love you no matter what the circumstances, through all things and at all times.’ Isn’t that what it says? A perfect picture of God’s love...

So, unconditional (agápe) love in human beings looks like this... Noted surgeon Richard Selzer wrote a book called ‘Mortal Lessons’ and in it he wrote about what he’d learned regarding unconditional (agápe) love:

“I stand by the bed where a young woman lies, her face post-operative, her mouth twisted in palsy, clownish looking. A tiny twig of the facial nerve, the one (attached) to the muscles in her mouth, had been severed. I had to cut the little nerve. Her young husband is in the room. The young woman speaks. ‘Will my mouth always be like this?’ she asks. ‘Yes,’ I say, ‘it will. It’s because the nerve had to be cut.’ She nods and is silent, but the young man smiles. ‘I like it,’ he says. ‘It’s kind of cute.’ Unmindful (that I was in the room), he bends to kiss her crooked mouth. I’m so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers ... to show her that their kiss still works...”

This story is powerful, because it depicts the unconditional love we receive from God ... and the love we need to be showing each other in relationships. But it’s hard, isn’t it? Why is it so hard sometimes? Because ... we cannot give what we have not received ourselves, which leads me to the final truth today. Do you want to lower your stress in relationships? Then understand this: *True...*

**LOVE (like we just heard about) IS ... DEMONSTRATED BY JESUS CHRIST. 1**

John 3:16a says clearly, “We know what real love is [HOW?] because Jesus gave up his life for us....” We can’t know what LOVE truly is from our culture, or even from another person; Jesus is the only place to find out what true LOVE really is... And Jesus showed us so many times ... with Peter (denying Jesus), with Judas (who would betray Jesus), with the woman at the well, with the woman caught in adultery—nothing but LOVE!

Let me introduce you to a very important love principle today. It’s called ‘The Principle of Experiential Love.’ And this principle says this: “You can’t love until you’ve been loved,

and then you can only love according to how much you've been loved." Let me say that in a different way: "The amount of love that I can give is dependent on the amount of love I've received."

And that's why it's so important to open your life up to God's agápe (unconditional) love ... because it's only when you experience the unconditional love of God that you can then, in turn, show real unconditional love to the people who are most important to you! Folks, how did God love us ... *unconditionally*? What did that look like? I'm glad you asked. Let's close with this (and read it right along with me, would you (John 3:16, NLT)?

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

Our world is going to try to define LOVE for us. But, the truth is ... it's only God who can do that; it's only God who has modeled that LOVE for us—what Jesus did on the cross...

LOVE is a choice, LOVE is a compromise, Love is unconditional, and love is demonstrated by Jesus Christ. Can I ask you a final question today? Will you allow God's love to fill your heart today? Will you allow this LOVE of God we've been talking about to rule in your home today? Will you allow God's love to be the glue in the midst of your relationships? It's the only way I know to lower stress in relationships ... that works!