

## Love Is More Than a Theory

Have you ever had theories? You know, thoughts on how you believe something should go or be. We all know that theories are great, until they have a head on collision with reality.

How you envision things going is rarely the same as how they actually go. This truth also applies to dealing with people. Loving people is really simple in theory, but it can be really messy in reality.

Thankfully we learn from Jesus that *love is so much more than a theory*.

In Matthew 22:35-40, Jesus simplifies the 613 Old Testament laws into two commandments: Love the Lord your God and love others as you love yourself.

This should be simple, right? From 613 laws down to 2. How hard can this be?

This is so simple in theory, isn't it? Loving people and loving your neighbor sounds so straightforward. If this is all it takes, if these are the only commandments and all the others hang on these two then I think we're going to be okay. But reality tells us something different: *love is messy*.

Proverbs 14:14 says, "*Where there are no oxen the manger is clean, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest.*" Basically, if you want a clean barn, don't keep any animals. Just don't expect an abundant harvest. And, if you want an easy, problem free life just keep other people out of it, but like the Proverb says, don't expect any of the benefits either.

Yes, you need to love your neighbor even if they are not like you.

Again, loving people in theory sounds so easy but in reality it can just get really messy really quick. Love is so much more than a theory.

Often times, we in the church do so much that is internally focused. Most of us know how to do church; in fact we do it pretty well. We often struggle, however, *being* the church. Our good and godly programs, habits and routines can keep us from interactions and experiences with others who really need to hear the gospel. If our faith never moves us to action then we may want to reconsider our faith. (cf. James 2:14-26, Galatians 3:1-9)

It almost seems like the longer we follow Jesus the neater, cleaner, and more sanitized our lives seem to become.

Jesus lived a very different life. Jesus frequented the tables and the homes of people who were very different from Him -- people that a "religious" man wouldn't want to be seen with. Jesus hung out with people that others tried to ignore. He learned their names, He listened to their stories, He shared meals with them and challenged them in love and truth.

Some of the people Jesus crossed paths with didn't magically clean their lives up and start living "good Christian lives" after meeting Jesus. Instead they stayed messy; some of them really messy, but Jesus loved them anyway. He articulated love with his words AND his actions.

It wasn't just a theory for Jesus, it was His reason for being and living and moving in and through the lives of others.

There's no clean way to eat ribs and there's no clean way to love others. It's all messy business. It can be overwhelming and frightening to consider the cost of relationships, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Mother Theresa said, "Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you."

Love stops being a nice theory when we start loving the people around us. When theories turn to action we see our weakness on full display, but we also see the power of God working through our weakness.

If Jesus can leave His heavenly throne, take on the humble nature of a servant, live and die to reconcile us all to the Father for the rest of eternity, then we can get a little messy loving others too.

All my theories made sense *before* I actually did the thing I was hypothesizing about. It was always after I did the thing, that I realized it was different from what I thought it would be. In every case it was much more difficult than I could've imagined, but it was also much more satisfying and fulfilling.

This is the challenge for the day. Stop theorizing about loving others and just start. Start small. Start close to you - your neighbors, your co-workers, the baristas in your local coffee shop.

Last week I challenged you to learn someone's name. This week I want to challenge you to take the next step. I want you to love someone near to you as you would love and care for yourself. This challenge is going to look different for all of us.

Why do we need to love messy people? Because they need Jesus. You're messed up, and you know you were a nobody until Jesus called your name, and got involve in your messy life. Jesus uses messy people, because His power to save and restore is seen in messy lives.

I pray that your theories about loving others would turn to action this week; you will turn to loving messy people.