



September 12, 2011

Next Steps

Weeding Our Lives

1 John 2.15-17

Have you ever heard something and you just couldn't get it out of your head no matter how hard you tried? I have. Most of the time it is some nonsense saying or song that gets stuck on repeat in my mind for a bit, but after enough time and a good bit of flushing with something else I get it out. There is one saying that I have never been able to get out of my head. Sometimes it is quieter than others, but it comes to mind almost every single day. I first heard it about six years ago from a friend who was speaking to his child. He said, "We love people, not things."

I don't remember the exact context in which those words were first spoken in my presence, but I can't count the number of times I heard my friend say it to both of his children. They would run up and say, "Daddy, look at this. . . I love it." Usually it was something they had picked up somewhere along the ground. He would respond by saying, "We love people, not things." At first, my reaction was somewhat allergic. How could you not love things? There are all sorts of things to love and reasons to love them. Pie. Hot cherry pie is something worthy of love. Sunsets. Who can't love sunsets? And what about long strolls on the beach? If you can't love them, then what can you love? Every time he spoke those words I came up with some object in my mind that was deserving of my love. Over time the fullness of what he was saying began to sink in. My friend wasn't saying that hot cherry pie wasn't wonderful. If he was, then I don't know if I could have been his friend. What he was saying was that love was something God had reserved first for Himself and then for people. Love given to anything other than these two was misdirected and misused.

Here's the funny thing about love in my own life. When I look hard I find that my love is directed to all manner and sort of things. Have I ever mentioned my love for cherry pie? Then there is my love for reading and my love for running. I take great delight in sunrises and sunsets.

In my more evil moments I love being right and getting my way. I love pretty indiscriminately. The trouble is that my love for all manner and sort of things has a way of diluting my love for God. You see love isn't just a feeling. Love is about devotion. The things we love are those things to which we give our devotion. Those things we love are in fact are the things that motivate and direct our lives. When I give my love to God and to many other things my love pulls me in more than one direction at once. When this occurs the result is that I either go nowhere or run the risk of being torn asunder. Maybe that is why John reminds us to set aside love for anything other than God. Only a focused devotion to God will allow us to get anywhere in life.

So what are we to do if we find that our love is divided and thus pulling us in more than one direction at once? Well, we can start to take steps to redirect our love. The first step is asking what we want most in life. Do we want God or something else? If we want God then we have to ask what is standing in the way and take steps to remove those things systematically and put them in their rightful place. If we want something else, then we have to ask ourselves why that is. What is it that makes an object or a person more desirable than God? We can confess this to God and ask for His grace in redirecting our devotion. It doesn't happen all at once, but over time as we evaluate our lives we will find our lives more focused and purposeful, devoted in love to God first. When this is settled we will find that all other things, even cherry pie can be enjoyed with great delight in their rightful place.

A fellow traveler,

Blake
Spiritual Formation Pastor

My Next Step

We encourage you to consider doing the following as a way of handing off faith to your family. . .

- **Use the word “love” purposefully:** As a family, seek to reserve the word “love” for people and God. When tempted to say that you “love” things, restate yourself by stating that you “like” these things. As your children use “love” to refer to objects and things, gently remind them that love is reserved for people and God. In so doing you will teach them to focus their love and devotion according to God's intentions.

We encourage you to consider taking the following next step on your faith journey. . .

- **Practice simplicity:** One of the greatest ways to turn your love and devotion to God is to practice simplicity. Simplicity is the practice of using and possessing as little as possible. It is a way of being that reminds us that what we truly need in life is God. You might consider taking a small step this week by removing something from your life that you “love.” This might be a favorite food or pastime. When your mind turns its attention to desire for this thing, offer a prayer to God asking for His grace to love Him first above all other things in life.