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SERIES: LOVE NOW

Part 4: LOVE ACTS

Good morning, and welcome home CVCHURCH. We are a multicultural and intergenerational church. Today is our last Sunday in this life-transforming series I have entitled LOVE NOW. We're going to look at the idea that love is not so much a feeling or sentiment, but love—at its very core, LOVE ACTS.

My goal for myself and for you is that we all become the best lovers of God and others we can become. The best way to learn anything is to learn by a model. When we see somebody else doing it and go, "Oh, that's how you do it! I've got that!" We always learn faster, quicker and deeper when somebody gives us an example. Who is the best example for love? It's Jesus Christ. Jesus was the only person with perfect love, with perfect understanding of relationships.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, "**So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples.**" Circle, "**Just as I have loved you.**" Jesus says the way that I have modeled for you, the way that I have loved you, I want you to pass that on to other people. First I want you to see, hear and feel just how much God truly does love you, and I am asking you to allow yourself to feel and experience His love. Then second, we're going to look at how God wants you to pass it on to other people.

I want to look at with you: **Four ways Jesus loves you, and how you can give that love away to others.**

**I. I must accept others the way Jesus accepts me**

As followers of Jesus, we are to be the most accepting people in the world. The fact is, the deepest wounds you've ever had in your life—bar none—are the wounds of rejection. Those are the things that hurt you the most—when you've

been rejected; when somebody's put you down. Maybe you've been betrayed. Maybe you've been belittled. Maybe you've been told that you were worthless or you're never going to amount to anything. In those deep wounds of rejection are your deepest hurts.

We've all had them. We've had them from parents. You've had them from peers on the playground. You've had them from partners. You may have had them from a former spouse. You've had them from professionals in your career. Everybody experiences rejection in life. We spend most of our lives trying to avoid it.

There is this myth out there that if I could just be perfect then everybody would love me. If I could just be perfect, if I never did anything wrong, even if I am imperfect - if I don't show any imperfections, then everybody's going to love me and nobody's going to reject me and everybody's going to accept me.

Friends, that's just wrong. Jesus was perfect, and they nailed Him to a cross. No matter what you do, somebody's not going to like you. No matter what you do, somebody's going to disagree. Somebody is going to reject you.

So the starting point in learning to love other people is you have to realize how much God accepts you.

How does Jesus love you? In John 6:37 Jesus says, "**However, those the Father has given Me will come to Me, and I will never reject them.**" Please circle, "I will never reject them." What this means is that Jesus says I will always, always, always accept them. It's not a conditional acceptance; He says I will always accept you.

Have you ever realized that He's accepted you? You can be a Christian, you can be a follower of Jesus all your life and never really feel accepted by God. You feel like God's always putting you down, that God's always blaming you, that God's always on your case. That no matter what you do it's not good enough.

This feeling often comes from the un-pleasable people in our lives, not God. It comes from un-pleasable parents. Many people grew up with un-pleasable parents. Everybody grew up with conditional love, because nobody loves unconditionally all the time. We learn love like, “I love you if... you do these things. Or I love you because... you do these things.” So we learn conditional love.

But God says, “No, I just love you, period! I don’t love you because of who you are but because of who I am. Not because of what you do, but because of what I’ve done. Not because of your conduct, but because of My character.”

We need to drive this stake in the ground today. God says, “I love you unconditionally. I will always accept you.”

Let me say something to you as your pastor, as your friend, as somebody who loves you. If you haven’t got your parents’ approval by now, or your siblings or someone who you have desired to have their approval, you aren’t going to get it. It has nothing to do with you; it has everything to do with them. Hurt people hurt people. If you haven’t got your parents’ approval by now, you’re not going to get it.

But here’s the good news: you don’t need it to be happy! There are six and a half billion people in the world. If two people don’t like you so what? I like you. God likes you. There are other people who like you. If two un-pleasable parents say, “No,” I can find a whole lot of other people who’ll say, “Yes.”

I like what Psalm 27:10 says, please read it out loud with me, “**Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.**” This is how much God loves you. He says, “I’m going to accept you no matter what.” In fact, look at how He does it.

John 3:17 says, “**God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him.**” How does He make us acceptable? By His grace. He just says, “You’re acceptable.” It’s not that you changed. It’s not that you got any better. It’s not that you are perfect. It’s not that you never sin.

No, you're going to sin the rest of your life. Jesus just says, "I'm going to make you acceptable by My grace." It's not based on performance.

God wants you to do that with other people, but one of the problems is most people don't know the difference between acceptance and approval. Very, very different. Jesus Christ accepts you completely. He loves you and accepts you. That doesn't mean He approves of everything you do. No, He doesn't do that. But He accepts you.

You can accept someone without approving of what they do—without approving of their lifestyle, without approving of the way they're living. You can accept them for who they are because they are of great value to God, and they are of great value to you.

The Bible says that God chose to accept us. He *chose* to accept us and make us acceptable to God. Ephesians 1:4-5 says, **"Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure."**

Here's the point. One of the hallmarks of love is acceptance. Jesus Christ accepts us, and He wants that to be a leading value and characteristic in how we treat each other. God says, "I accept you unconditionally. I don't approve of everything you do, but I accept you unconditionally, and I love you." And God says, "I want you to do that with everybody in your life." Romans 15:7 **"Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory."**

How can we show acceptance to each other? Acceptance says I listen to the fears and the doubt of others. Acceptance is willing to embrace another person's hurt, pain, wound, and disappointment. True acceptance says there is nothing that you have done or has been done to you that will cause me to want to turn away from you. You're safe with me. I love you for who you are. You can

share your secrets with me, and we'll take them to Jesus, because He knows what to do with them.

During this four week series, we have been working on these truths together by developing the habits of the heart and the skills for genuine loving. Here's our homework for week number four, practicing love. The first action step says,

**This week I will show acceptance to \_\_\_\_\_**

I want you to write in the name of somebody specific. Somebody who really irritates you or angers you and is hard to love. Don't look at them. Don't elbow them. In fact, don't write down the name of anybody on your row—just in case they happen to see it. Don't write down a family member—yeah, you can work on somebody in your family too, but that doesn't count. I want you to choose somebody that you have a hard time accepting. I want you to think about that person here at church that you really struggle with. We have had people leave our CVCHURCH family because they have felt hurt by one of us. Loved ones, it's time for each one of us to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves and attend to those relationships that bother us the most.

These are EGR people—Extra Grace Required. This week when we work on love, I want you to show acceptance to somebody who really irritates you or is hard to love. When you start thinking, “Lord, I don't want to love that person!”, you start thinking about how much God loves you.

Loving like Jesus means I get to accept other people the way Jesus accepts me.

## **II. Loving like Jesus means I must value others the way Jesus values me**

How valuable are you? How much are you worth? I'm not talking about your net worth. I'm talking about your self-worth. How much are you worth?

Let me tell you how worthwhile you are. You are infinitely valuable to God. First, God created you. Second, Jesus died for you. Third, He puts His Spirit

within you. Fourth, He wants you to be with Him forever in eternity. That's how valuable you are to God. You are infinitely valuable to God.

Jesus says in Luke 12:6-7, **“What is the price of five sparrows—two copper coins? Yet God does not forget a single one of them. 7 And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.”**

What makes something valuable? There are two things that make something valuable.

The first is who made it. Value depends on who made it. What is more valuable, a Faberge Easter egg or my Easter eggs—the ones that I color with my kids? There's no comparison.

**Value depends on who made you. God made you**

What does that mean? It means you're valuable.

Please read Ephesians 2:10 out loud with me, **“For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.”** I'm a piece of art. You are God's masterpiece. That's what the Bible says about you. You might think I'm a piece of work, but God says I'm His masterpiece. “We are God's masterpiece, God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.” In other words, before you were born God planned out what He wanted you to do with your life. He said, “You're my masterpiece,” and you're exactly what God wants you to be.

So value depends on who made you. God made you. Second...

**Value depends on what someone will pay**

How much is your house worth? Not as much as you think it is. It's worth whatever anybody will pay for it. I heard recently about an oil sheik in the Middle

East—his daughter was kidnapped. They took out an ad in the paper that said, “We will pay any price. She’s the king’s daughter.”

You are a child of the King. You were created by God, and Christ gave His life for you. Please read with me 1 Peter 1:18-20, **“For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom He paid was not mere gold or silver. 19 It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. 20 God chose Him as your ransom long before the world began, but He has now revealed Him to you in these last days.”**

Did you know that when you get to heaven the only scars that you’re going to see in heaven will be the scars on Jesus where He was nailed to the cross? Because for eternity people are going to be able to see, “This is how much I love you. See the nail prints in My hands? See the scars where they nailed Me to the cross? I don’t want you ever to forget, this is how much I love you. I have engraved you on the palms of My hands. I couldn’t forget you. A mom might forget her baby, but there’s no way I’m ever going to forget you. Every time I look at My hands I think, ‘That’s how much I love you.’”

You’re not just worthy, you’re not just acceptable—you are valuable. God says, “That’s how much I value you.”

Now Jesus says, “I want you to give that kind of value to everybody else that I love too. Because, I don’t just love you that way, I love everybody else that way. Even the people you can’t stand. I love them this much. So I expect you, if you’re My child, to love these people the same way I love them because I died for them, not just you. You are to treat them the same way that I treat them.” Value others the way Jesus values me.

What am I talking about? I’m talking about just being polite, courteous and respectful.

Pastor Rick Warren tells a story of how he took his sons with him to go pick up some dry cleaning. When he pulled up to the dry cleaners there was only one

parking spot available, and there were two young boys in their Karate outfits standing in the space. They had their backs turned to Rick so they didn't see him. Rick thought to himself, I'm not in a hurry, I'll just wait till they move out of the way. His son, Matthew, goes, "Dad, why don't you honk?" Rick said, "Because it would scare them. If you're only ten feet away and you hear a honk behind you, it'd kind of get your adrenaline going! I thought they'll eventually turn around and see me, and they'll move out of the way. I will just wait."

These two boys were talking. All of a sudden they turn around and they see a car wants to get in there, and they move out of the way.

Rick pulled in and got out, and he saw the boys and said, "So you guys like karate? What belt are you?" He just asked them a couple of real simple questions. He was valuing those two boys for who they are.

He gets his dry cleaning, and as he was getting into his car, he hears a voice behind him, "Can I talk to you a minute?" He turned around, and there's a man standing there. He said, "I noticed how you dealt with my boys. Aren't you a pastor?" "Yes, I am." He said, "I saw you on TV. I saw how you treated my boys. I'd like to go to a church like that." He's now attending Rick's church.

Please look at the second homework assignment.

**This week I will affirm the value of \_\_\_\_\_**

I want you to write in somebody's name there who has low self-esteem, somebody that you can affirm their value. When everybody else treats them like dirt, treats them like an outcast, treats them like they don't matter, you treat them like they do matter, because they do. They matter to God.

Write down a specific name. Don't write somebody in your family, because you can always do that. I'm talking about somebody outside your family. "I will show acceptance to and affirm the value of \_\_\_\_\_."

The third way to love...



### III. I must forgive others like Jesus forgives me

The crux of the Gospel of Jesus is that He has canceled the debt of sin against us that we could have never paid on our own. Every one of us has transgressed and violated God's character, nature and His laws. There is no way we could ever pay the price for our sins. He did this voluntarily and because He loves us. The dominant life principle of the Triune family—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, is love. God is not angry with you, and He doesn't just tolerate you. He loves you deeply, and He has canceled the debt you owe Him by paying it Himself.

Since Jesus loves us by showering us with forgiveness, He says this is how you and I are to respond to each other. This can be incredibly difficult because people sin against us, they betray us, they misrepresent us and Jesus says the most loving thing you can do to people who treat you this way is to forgive them.

Sometimes once you have forgiven them it is important to learn boundary setting skills with people who are not aware that they can be rude, unkind and demeaning in how they talk to other people. Being loving and tenderhearted to people who treat you this way means that you get the privilege of letting them know how they are coming across and that you would like them to stop. Most of us have not been willing to do this, but it is time that we grow in our loving skills and habits and that we choose to love each other this way by lovingly telling each other the truth.

Matthew 6:12, 14-15 says, **“And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.... 14 If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. 15 But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”**

Ephesians 4:23, **“Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”**

Colossians 3:13-14, **“Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourself with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.”**

The third action step:

**I will offer forgiveness this week to \_\_\_\_\_**  
(Someone who has hurt you or is carrying a load of guilt or shame)

Dear friends, if you’re going to become a world class lover and accept people the way God accepts you, you also get to value people the way God values you, you must forgive others the way God forgives you, and there is a fourth one—this is very important...

#### **IV. I must believe in others like Jesus believes in me**

Did you know that Jesus Christ truly does believe in you? He has given you all that you need to love Him and to love others. He thinks more highly of you than you are probably even capable of knowing. The truth is that we all have insecurities. How do you overcome the insecurities, fears and self-doubt? You start believing what Jesus says about you instead of believing what other people say about you. Please read out loud with me 1 Corinthians 13:7, **“Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”**

It’s exactly what Jesus did. He affirmed people around Him. Jesus looked at people, and He didn’t see what they were—He saw what they could become. He saw their potential. He saw their growth. He saw what God intended for them to be. He brought out the best in people—not by labeling them—but by saying, “I believe you can do it. I know you can do it.”

In fact, someday do a study of how many times Jesus said, “You can do it! I believe in you. I know you can do this. Nothing will be impossible. I believe in you.” Here’s one example found in Matthew 17:20, **“I tell you the truth, if you**

**had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.”**

If I’m going to learn how to be a world class lover I’ve got to show acceptance to—and I hope you’ve written a name in—affirm the value of, offer forgiveness to and...

**This week I will demonstrate trust in\_\_\_\_\_**

Write down a person. Somebody specific this week. If all you do is listen to this message and you walk out of here and don’t do this, you’ve got nothing out of this. You need to have a project. Somebody you see who has the potential for growth that you can say, I believe in you. Maybe you can think of somebody who’s been falsely accused of something, and you need to go and say, I believe in you. Or maybe somebody you’ve questioned their motives. You need to go and say, “I believe in you.” Or somebody, who has potential that nobody else has seen, and you need to say, “I believe in you.”

Psychologists tell us that your self-image, how you see yourself, is largely determined by what you think the most important person in your life thinks about you. The way you feel about yourself is determined by what you think the most important person in your life thinks about you.

So as your friend, as your pastor, somebody who loves you, I’m telling you, the best decision you can make today is to make Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior of your life. He says you are valuable. You are acceptable. You are lovable. You are forgivable. You are capable. You need to stop listening to what everybody else is saying about you. You need to stop listening to what your conscience is saying to yourself. You need to make Jesus Christ the most important Person in your life and listen to what He says about you. It really doesn’t matter what other people say. What matters is what God says, and who are you going to believe anyway?

Fred Craddock is a pastor. He tells the story of the time he was vacationing in Gaitlenburg, Tennessee. Fred and his wife were seated at a table in a restaurant, and an old man came up to them and asked, "Are you folks on vacation?" "Yes," said Fred, "and we're having a good time." The old man said, "So, what do you do for a living?" Fred said, "I'm a preacher." "Oh!" said the old man. "Let me tell you a preacher story."

He sat down by them. The old man said, "I was born an illegitimate child. I never knew who my father was. It was very, very hard on me growing up. The kids in school made fun of me. Growing up, I didn't have any friends at all. When I walked around our little town, I always felt people were staring at me and looking at me and saying, 'I wonder who's the father of that boy.' I spent a lot of time by myself. I didn't have any friends. One day a pastor came to town. Everybody was talking about how good he was. I had never gone to church, but I decided I'd go to church and hear this guy. So I went. And he was good. So I kept going back. But each time I went to church, I'd come in late and I'd leave early so I wouldn't have to talk to anybody. [Sounds like a lot of you.] Then one Sunday I got so caught up listening that I forgot to leave early, and the service ended, and the people stood up, and I couldn't get out the door. Suddenly I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder. When I turned, that big tall pastor was standing there with his hand on my shoulder looking at me and he said, 'What's your name, son? Whose boy are you? Whose son are you?' I just shook when I heard those words and I heard that question. But before I could say anything that pastor said this, 'I know who you are. I know who your family is. You have a distinct family resemblance. You're a son of God!'" The man said, "You know, those words changed my life."

The old man got up and he left, and a waitress came over a little bit later and said, "Do you know who you were talking to?" Fred said, no. She said, "That's Ben Hooper. Two time governor of Tennessee."

A man learned he was the child of God, and it changed his whole direction. It changed his destiny. He learned he was valuable and acceptable and lovable and forgivable and capable. It changed the rest of his life. And all the opinions of other people didn't matter any more.

I know without a doubt you've had wounds in your life. You've been hurt, no doubt. They're wounds from rejection by peers and parents and all the other people I've talked about. God cares. I care. This church cares. You need to make Jesus Christ the most important person in your life and start filling your mind with what He says. That is the starting point for love. You can't love others until you know how much God loves you. Ephesians 3:18, **"May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love really is."**

Prayer:

Thank You, Father, that You can heal broken hearts and bitter memories and damaged self-esteem and even the tears that are falling right now. Thank You. Thank You that we matter to You. Thank You that patterns can be erased and curses can be reversed. Thank You that You turn nobodies into somebodies. Jesus, I ask that You help people today, these dear friends of mine, You help them begin to see themselves through Your eyes of love. Thank You that we can depend upon Your love.

Now You pray. In your heart say this, "Dear Jesus Christ, help me to see myself the way You see me. Thank You for creating me. Thank You for loving me. Thank You for dying for me. I don't understand it all but thank You that You accept me and that You value me. And that You forgive me and that You believe in me. I want to believe in You. I want to trust You. Help me to care more about what You think of me than what other people think. May the truth set me free."

With our heads still bowed I want you to repeat these truths aloud after me: "Because of Jesus I am acceptable. I am valuable. I'm lovable. I am forgivable. And I am capable. Jesus, help me to see myself through Your eyes of love. And help me to see others the same way. Amen"