

“The Gong Show”

Series: Love Comes to Town Week 1. Without Love, I'm Nothing

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The Woodside Church

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I just celebrated my niece's wedding on the steps of the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis. There are a lot of Swedes in my wife's family and, in fact, I am Swedish – don't I look it – tall, blonde hair, blue eyes, handsome? No? Well I am Swedish. Now they say we Swedes are a silent people. A stoic people. We don't speak and we don't share our feelings. Swedes have a saying: A handshake is as good as a hug. At my niece's wedding I told the story of the Swedish couple who'd been married for 50 years. They went to the marriage counselor's office and the wife complained, “He never tells me he loves me.” To which the husband replied, “Fifty years ago, on our wedding day, I told you I loved you. If anything changes, you'll be the first to know.”

Starting today, Woodside, we want to learn to love a whole lot more than that. Every Fall we go on a churchwide journey—all of our Growth Groups—come together. We align ourselves around one biblical theme: LOVE! For 6 weeks we dive deep into God's Word to see what we can learn about loving God and others as Jesus did! Now is the perfect point to jump in! Growth Groups are starting this week and you can join one to meet new friends and experience community. We have Growth Groups for every age and stage. You can take notes during the Sunday sermon and then dive deeper into Bible study and discussion with your Growth Group during the week!

Let me begin by asking you a Critical Question. How would you complete this sentence?

My number one goal in life is...

Think about it for a minute. We have a lot of priorities but what's most important to me? You might say: My number one goal in life is to be happy, be successful, have fun, get married and raise a family or retire. My number one goal in life is to be popular and known for achieving something.

How you answer this question reveals your **Dominant Life Principle** or **DLP**. It's the Supreme Value that drives all your decisions. You may not be aware, but you use it all the time. Every time you make a choice you run it through this filter in your brain. You decide what you're going to do based on your Dominant Life Principle. If my dominant life principle is to:

Have Fun then if I'm asked to clean my room or go with my friends to the movies—I'm going to the movies. What's most important to me is having fun.

Make Money, or success in my career then I'll choose the most lucrative thing to do. “I wish I could go to my kids' game, but I gotta work this Saturday! I gotta get ahead.”

Stay Safe then I'll choose the safest choice. I'm not going on a mission trip, why would you risk that? There are earthquakes & hurricanes & bears...oh my!

Be Popular then I'll do whatever is most POPULAR with others. I'll choose what wins people's applause! Make sense? So what's the most important value in your life.

How does God answer this question? What does God say is the number one goal in life?

Let love be your highest goal. 1 Corinthians 14:1 (NLT)

Let love be your highest goal: Not status, success, possessions, power, privilege or prestige, not comfort or money. According to God, the Dominant Life Principle through which all decisions are filtered is LOVE! Love is supreme! Why does God say love is your highest goal? Because God is love! (I John 4:16) You are His child, and your Daddy wants you to be like Him! The Bible tells us God exists in a perfect relationship of Love – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God created everything and everyone in the universe out of love. He created you to receive His Love and to learn to Love like Jesus. Jesus summarizes the entire Bible in two sentences. If you get these two things, you'll get it. You'll understand what life is all about.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind and all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. There are no commands more important than these. Mark 12:30-31 (NCV)

Jesus said nothing in the world is more important than these 2 things: Learn to love God with all your heart and learn to love everybody else. To God, it doesn't matter how much you acquire, achieve, or accomplish. In the end, all that matters is Love.

Everything you do must be done with love. I Corinthians 16:14 (NLT)

Does that mean writing emails and texts? Yeah. Some of you need to tape this verse to your computer or phone: "Everything I type or text must be done with love." Does this include ordering fast food when you can't understand the speaker? Yeah. "Everything you do must be done with love." Does it include finding a parking spot at the mall when 2 other people want it. And one gives you the Philly salute? "Everything you do must be done with love." Does it include being nice to people who vote differently than you? "Everything you post on Facebook must be done with love." Life is all about relationships. And relationships are all about sacrificial LOVE.

Over the next 6 weeks we'll learn how Jesus' Supernatural Love can fill you and transform all relationships - even the hard-to-love ones! If you give Christ full access to your heart, His Love will change you! And as you change, your relationships will begin to change. I'm not saying it's easy. We'll cover some rocky terrain. Here's a preview:

- Today's message is **The Gong Show**. I'll introduce 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter)
- Next week is **Love Actually** Not romantic movie love but, according to God, the highest kind of love: sacrificial love. Learning to love people who are unlovable.
- Week 3 is **To Tell You the Truth**. How do you have healthy conflict? How do you "speak the truth in love" without crushing people?
- Week 4 is **Triggered!** Anger isn't a sin! Anger is a misunderstood emotion! Learning to express anger in a healthy, constructive way is a key to loving relationships!
- Week 5 is **Like a Good Neighbor** how love builds a bridge to others who aren't like us.
- Week 6 is **The Church Has Left the Building** We'll go out to share God's love in practical ways.
- Finally: Week 7 is **Everlasting Love** We'll learn secrets to make love last a lifetime.

So this is the journey—it will be eye-opening, honest, maybe a little painful as it stretches you, but ultimately, you will grow. That's the whole Goal of Life: To grow deeper in LOVE with Jesus, show love to others like Jesus!

Let's start today with a benchmark or baseline. Please get out the little quiz in your bulletin called: "Self-Assessment" Grab a pen because I'd like all of us to complete it right now. At the top it says, "Take a moment to rate the quality of your relationships. Where there is a blank line, fill in the name of a significant person." There is a list with a scale of 1-9 Poor to Great. The object of this Self-Assessment is not to make you feel bad. This is Love Comes to Town not Guilt Comes to Town. The goal is to discover where your relationships are right now.

1) **Parents:** How is your relationship with your parents right now? Just a quick evaluation. Would you say it's poor, it's great, somewhere in between? Even if your parents have passed away, like mine, you can still improve your relationship with your parents in your attitude toward them, in your thoughts about them. Maybe there's some work to do there.

2) **Friends:** School friends, teammates, boyfriends, girlfriends, broken friendships. Choose a friend, write the name in the blank and rate the quality of your relationship with that friend.

3) **Spouse:** How about your husband or wife? How's your relationship right now? Be brutally honest. The question is: How can you heal a struggling relationship? How can you take a good relationship and make it even better?

4) **Relative:** It might be a brother or sister an Aunt or an Uncle. Assess the relationship.

5) **Co-workers:** Does someone at work need God's love? Maybe there's conflict and you want to learn how to get along. Write their name down.

6) **Neighbors:** Jesus says we're supposed to love our neighbors, even ones that aren't like us! Do you have a negative neighbor? Is there one you'd like to serve in a practical way this Fall?

7) **Difficult Person:** If they're sitting next to you, don't draw an arrow pointing to them - not cool! Is there someone who irritates you or is hard to love? If you think: "There's no way I could love that person" write the name down. See what God does during this series!

8) **Children:** Maybe you'd like to be more patient with your son. Or you need help loving my daughter who's so sarcastic, cynical, kinda prickly. Rate where the relationship is right now.

Alright, so you completed your Self-Assessment! In your Growth Group this week, share about 1-2 relationships you want to work on during this series. We all have relationships which need work. With God's Love, tough ones can become tender and good ones become better. When God's love fills me, it makes a huge impact on all these relationships.

And that's the key. It must be the love of Jesus Christ that changes us. Just Trying to be more loving won't work. It's not about Trying Harder. It's about Trusting God! Human effort always falls short. The key is to invite Jesus Christ to love through you. Before you can give the Love of God, you must receive the Love of God. You can't give out what you haven't taken in. The Bible says: We love because He first loved us! When you receive Christ's love, His forgiveness, His mercy, His patience, His grace first, then it starts to BUBBLE UP OUT of you! Give Him full access to your heart first. Let Him live His life through you.

The greatest chapter on love in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 13. It's the one you often hear at weddings: "Love is patient. Love is kind." Most people miss a powerful image at the beginning:

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 1 Corinthians 13:1 (NLT)

According to Paul, nothing is more important than loving others! You can be a gifted speaker. An anointed orator. You can speak in the tongues of men and angels. But if you don't love others, you will only be...what? A noisy gong or clanging cymbal! Paul says: This is what your life sounds like without LOVE! (GONG!) If you don't live a life of love NOTHING YOU SAY will matter! Words without LOVE are just NOISE. They're empty. Deafening. Annoying!

Remember the Gong Show? That's what happens when you combine America's Got Talent with the 70s. It was a talent contest where amateurs try to impress a panel of judges with their skills. Some of the acts are SO BAD— a guy playing a kazoo on a unicycle-- that the judges hit this GIANT GONG to stop the performance! You get ZERO POINTS! It counts for NOTHING! This is what Paul says about Words without Love. But he doesn't stop there. In verse 2 he says,

If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2 (NLT)

I can be highly intelligent with a Masters, a PhD, and more degrees than Fahrenheit. I can be a walking Bible encyclopedia - full of knowledge, but if I don't share this knowledge with love, I am what? GONG! Nothing! I'm just NOISE! Without love nothing you say or know will matter! You're just a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. You get a score of ZERO! Zilch! Nada! Paul adds:

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3 (NLT)

What if I give Money to the poor? What if I become a Missionary in foreign lands? What if I become a Martyr for the faith? In God's eyes if you do it without Love (GONG!) Many give and serve with mixed motives. Some give to get glory, prestige or their name on a plaque! And let's be honest: Sometimes it's a lot easier to write a check than get involved in someone's messy life and love them! But the Bible says: If I give without LOVE for God and others NONE of it counts!

A guy may say, "You know, I don't understand it! I buy my wife and kids everything they could ever want. But my wife's cold to me. My kids don't even talk to me." Yes, but did you LOVE them? Did you give them what they needed most? You can't buy your kids. Some parents try to compensate for their lack of time and attention by buying their kids a lot of stuff. Kids don't need things. They need YOU! Kids need your time. That's how they know you love them.

Let love be your highest goal. Without Love nothing you say, do, believe, give or accomplish matters. We need to take a deep breath and think carefully: Am I living a life of love or am I just making noise? I don't know about you. But I don't want get to Heaven and face the Gong Show. God calls my name: Doug Hoglund, good sermon, great church! But you forgot to love. (GONG!) This Fall, I want to make time to be more Loving to my family, friends, more

loving toward you. There's a lotta areas I need God to work on. And I'm guessing you do too. So how serious are you about having better relationships? You can't do this in your spare time. This must become your DLP—Dominant Life Principle. Decide today that the most important thing is: I want to love others as Jesus loves me! Amen?

How do I do it? Here are four ACTION STEPS to get the most out of this journey:

1) **Pray Each Day** – Get a daily dose of God's love for you by using the 42 Day Devotional: *Living in God's Love*. Read it at mealtime or bedtime with your family. Read, reflect and pray about them during your quiet time with the Lord.

2) **Worship Each Week** - come ready to worship and hear God's message of Love for you.

3) **Go To Your Group** - The Bible is best understood alongside other believers. Growth Groups are a safe place to ask questions, dive deeper into Scripture, share your heart, and pray with others! In your Group, you process, pray and practice what you're learning.

4) **Sign-Up to Serve** – This series culminates in an epic outreach called **The Church Has Left the Building**. On the weekend of November 1 and 2 we will go out and love our neighbors. We are planning Local Outreach Projects. You'll hear more about it in the weeks to come. When you sign up to serve, you get one of these Love T-shirts!

This year I've been at the bedsides of people in their last moments. I can tell you what they didn't say: Bring me my diplomas. Bring me my trophies. Bring me my resume or my bank statements. They say, "Bring me the people I love!" That's who they want around them in the last hours of life. God put you here to learn how to love Him and others with all your heart.

A mom who felt overwhelmed by her children, her schedule, her responsibilities, the busyness of her life wrote this letter: "All I seemed to do was nag and bark at and scold my kids incessantly. When I looked at myself I honestly saw a shrew. In my tears I cried out to God." Then she read I Corinthians 13. "In reading that," she said, "five words leaped out at me. Without love, I am nothing." She realized her life was the Gong Show—full of Sound & Fury... signifying nothing. So she wrote those words "Without love, I'm nothing." and put them on her refrigerator, her car, on her mirror, where she could see them all the time. Here's what she wrote:

"I realized that the single most important thing I could do was to love my family. So I began to live my life by the love of Jesus. I began to run my home on love power. It was as transforming as when I accepted Christ into my life. Focusing on love brought the happiness back into my life and our home."

Who knows what God will do... If you slow down... step away from the Gong Show... and invest the time to DIVE DEEP into a life that runs on Love Power—the Love of Christ!

Things can change... hearts can be healed... passions rekindled... relationships repaired. With Christ, all things are possible, amen?

Let's Pray together. As we bow our heads for prayer, I want to invite you to pray along with me in your heart. You don't have to say it aloud. Just pray:

Dear Jesus, I want to be more loving. This Fall, I wanna work on my relationships. I want to learn to love you with all of my heart. My #1 goal is to let Your love flow through me to others.

Lord, I've got some hurts in my heart that need to be healed. I need to feel your forgiveness. I can't give to others what I don't receive myself. Please fill me with your grace. HS, pour your Molten Love into every crack of my heart so it can bubble up out of me into others. Replace my fears with your peace. And let your love flow through me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen!"