



ORIGIN STORIES

When Pastor Andrew was in Junior High, he and his dad got into a hobby of collecting comic books. There's a theme in the stories: A young high school kid named Peter Parker gets bit by a radioactive spider from a LAB and turns him into Spiderman; Bruce Banner is in a LAB and gets hit with a high concentration of gamma rays and becomes the Hulk; Barry Allen is a forensic scientist in a LAB and gets hit with chemicals and lightening and becomes The Flash. The point isn't that they all started with a lab accident ☺, but that these are all origin stories of the most iconic superheroes. They allow us to understand how the superheroes became who they are and why they can do the things they can do. As we delve into the concept of biblical love, we can't fully understand it without understanding love's origin. This is particularly important because, in our culture, love seems subjective because we don't base it on its contextual biblical story.

1. How would you define love? What is this definition based on?

THE ORIGIN OF LOVE SHOWS US THE MAGNITUDE OF LOVE

[1st JOHN 4:7-12] We can look at love in many ways but we can't land on an objective understanding of love unless we know its origin story. It's not just a feeling or emotion but has its origin in the very character of God Himself. 1st John tells us that love is who God IS. Love's origin shows us its depth, meaning and substance. Love is the very essence and fabric of God's nature; therefore, understanding love is rooted in who God is. We don't understand love if we don't understand this origin. When we understand that God is love, it puts into context the rest of creation (primarily you and me) because, in order for God to be loving, He couldn't do it in a vacuum but there has to be an object of that love; therefore, God created. The very purpose of our creation is to be objects of God's love. God created because He wants you to know His love, and God wants you to know your purpose, significance, and magnitude in that context. You were created to experience the unconditional love of God. Until we receive God's love, we will seek some form or type of it elsewhere.

2. Where are some places that we look for love outside of God?
3. How does this understanding of love in a biblical context change your definition of love?

GOD'S LOVE IS NOT CONTINGENT AND YOU ARE OF SUPREME SIGNIFICANCE TO HIM

You are significant and of supreme worth and value simply because you were created as the object of God's love. Many of us struggle with our significance, value, or identity. We ask whether we matter. The bad thing is if we struggle to find those things outside of God's love, we'll look to find it in something else such as the validation of our friends, our boss, or our spouse. But all of those things are contingent on something else for it to be significant. In contrast, God's love is not contingent. We have value simply because we were created by God. The darkest place in our minds, where we question our significance, is a place where the Evil One will try to tell you something different, but God tells wants you to know that you are of supreme significance, value, and worth to Him.

4. Where do you find your identity and value?
5. How dependable is it? How does realizing God's unconditional love affect it?

LOVING ISN'T DIFFICULT, BUT KNOWING WE'RE LOVED IS

We're created not just to receive love, but to give love. Jesus said everything in the Law and Prophets hangs on simply loving God with everything you have and loving others as you love yourself. Loving isn't difficult, but knowing we're loved is. The problem with our ability to show love correctly is because we haven't accepted it fully. We think we're on this conditional scale by which God loves us, but if we live on a conditional love scale, that's how we'll show it. The truth is that God created us to be the recipients of His unconditional love. If we understood the magnitude of God's love, our relationships with other people would look radically different. (This doesn't mean we don't have boundaries and just put up with people's behavior at any particular time.) If we realized how much God loves us, it would change everything.

6. On a scale from 1 to 10, what is your state of KNOWING how much God loves you? Why?

THE RADICAL LOVE OF GOD CHANGES HOW WE SEE PEOPLE

When we understand God's love, we can be a loving church. No matter who walks in the back door, we can be ready to introduce them to Jesus. He can change people, but we're called to love, not cancel culture. The world is messed up because people aren't very loving. We must understand how we're loved by God in order for us to show the correct kind of love toward others. The radical love of God changes how we see people. Understanding God's love makes it easier for us to love people who aren't similar to us. This is a test of God's love in us.

7. What makes us uncomfortable as people walk into church very different from us or what we think church should look like?
8. How can we best be a church that expresses the love of God?

GOD IS THE HALLMARK FOR LOVE AND THE DEFINITION OF LOVE

[1 Cor. 13:4-8] If God is love and love is all of these things, this is a character profile of God Himself. This isn't just a list of what love is but a revelation of who God is. This is important because the Scriptures present a father image of God, but many of us project onto God the Father what we experienced with our earthly father. We can't project any failings of our earthly father onto God because it is only God that is the standard for fatherhood. If we let 1 Corinthians 13 be our hallmark for love, our world would look vastly different.

9. What parts of 1 Corinthians 13 are easiest and hardest for you in showing love? Why?

LOVE IS SHOWN – GOD CREATED US TO LOVE US AND SO WE CAN SHOW LOVE TO OTHERS

[1st John 4:9] Love isn't just a subjective feeling or emotion but by its origin love is God. We then understand God wants us to be a recipient of His love. But lastly, love is shown. If we simply say it and don't show it, we ultimately don't believe it. God sent His one and only Son into the world to demonstrate His love for us. This is what we anticipate as Christmas. Christmas is because God loves you!

10. Who are you having a hard time loving right now and why? What does God need to do in your heart in relation to this?