

**THE MESSAGE****Feb 7, 2010****Philippians 2:1-11****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller*****Our Heart***

One week, one week until Valentine's Day. Can you believe it? Didn't we just celebrate Christmas and New Year's last week? And doesn't Thanksgiving seem like ages ago?

With Valentine's Day coming next week I was thinking about the important people in my life; my friends, my family, and my wife - Amber. Those relationships continue to shape me into the person I am becoming. I am in the process of becoming what God wants me to be.

God created us to be in relationships – loving relationships – connecting relationships. Think about the important people in your life. Where would you be without those relationships?

Here's one thing I've learned over the years, relationships take work. Relationships are only as good as we make them. We need to invest in our relationships.

A friend of mine was telling me about a book he and his wife are reading together. It's called, *The Love Dare*. It was the book used in the 2008 film *Fireproof* by Alex and Stephen Kendrick. Amber and I watched that movie last year. I know some of you did too because you recommended it to us.

In that movie, Caleb and Catherine Holt's marriage is in a crisis. They decide to get a divorce. But Caleb's father, John, suggested his son delay their separation for 40 days and follow a process for healing their relationship using the book -- *The Love Dare*. It has the potential to lead them back into a healthy, life-giving, and committed relationship. In the movie and in the book, one "dare" is assigned to each consecutive day for 40 days.

My friend was telling me that he and his wife are reading that book and doing the dares. He said it has helped to strengthen their relationship. They are now on dare #12. Dare #12 is "Love Lets the Other Win." He said that is so hard for him to do. As I listened I found myself thinking how hard that is for me to do. I was so intrigued by our conversation that I went to JOY Bookstore and bought the book.

My friend told me that there is something in his wiring, in his DNA as a human being that likes to win. Call it a competitive spirit, a need to be right, a guy thing, whatever. Call it what you like. I'm calling it human nature.

Here's the thing, we've all got that going on. Every man, woman and child battles with the drive to win, to be first, to be right, to be recognized, to be praised, to be rewarded, to be noticed, to be appreciated. No one likes to give in; no one really likes to lose.

It's a condition of the human heart, and it sneaks out in all kinds of ways. Little disagreements go unresolved; miscommunications hang in the air and grow into a storm cloud. The next disagreement goes there too. And the storm cloud grows bigger until "all you know what breaks loose." The impasse in the relationship is fueled by stubbornness and anger and resentment and pride.

Every relationship can go sour. And if that sourness isn't addressed the relationship can become rotten and ugly and unhealthy. Listen to what they write in *The Love Dare* (page 57). *These issues may not crop up every day, they keep resurfacing and don't really go away. You never seem to get any closer to a resolution or a compromise. The heels just keep digging in. It's like driving with the park brake on.*

Even the best of friends can find themselves in an ugly relationship! It can be awful. Truth is we've probably all been there at one time or another with someone. But in *The Love Dare*, the authors turn to Philippians 2 for clarity and a fresh way out. They use marriage as the context, but this is great advice for any relationship. In dare #12, the Kendricks write:

*There's only one way to get beyond stalemates like these, and that's by finding a word that's the opposite of stubbornness. That word is "willing." It's an attitude and spirit of cooperating that should permeate our conversations. It's like a palm tree by the ocean that endures the greatest winds because it knows how to gracefully bend. And the one best example of it is Jesus Christ, as described in Philippians 2. Follow the progression of His selfless love.*

*As God, He had every right to refuse becoming a [hu]man but yielded and did – because He was willing. He had the right to be served by all [hu]mankind but came to serve us instead. He had the right to live in peace and safety but willingly laid down His life for our sins. He was even willing to endure the grueling torture of the cross. He loved, cooperated, and was willing to do His Father's will instead of His own.*

*In light of this amazing testimony, the book of Philippians applies to us a one-sentence summary statement: "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5) – the attitude of willingness, flexibility, and humble submission. It means laying down for the good of others what you have the right to claim for yourself.*

*All it takes for your present arguments to continue is for both of you to stay entrenched and unbending. But the very moment one of you says, "I'm willing to go your way on this one," the argument will be over. And though the follow-through may cost you some pride and discomfort, you have made a loving, lasting investment in your marriage.*

(*The Love Dare*, Stephen and Alex Kendrick with Lawrence Kimbrough. B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee).

This is great advice for every relationship.

In his letter to the Philippians - written from a prison cell in Rome 800 miles away - Paul addresses the issue of strained, hurting, and life-draining relationships that the people of faith were experiencing in the church of Philippi.

Their relationships were in trouble, disunity was growing among them. They seemed to have forgotten how to care for others in spite of their differences. They had put their own wants and needs first. They stopped encouraging each other. They stopped showing compassion for one another. They had given up the mind of Christ in their relationships.

Paul uses words that have power for living in healthy relationships. Words like: *encouragement, consolation, sharing, compassion, sympathy, joy, and humility*. In a culture driven by discouragement, disappointment, selfishness, indifference, conceit, and pride, Paul writes to a faith community saying...

*“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 2:1-5).

These are great words for us to consider. Paul is offering us a way to deal with our strained relationships moving away from putting ourselves first of needing to be right. He provides a way of moving towards being the kind of servants that reflect the heart of Christ in all of our relationships; a heart that is willing to serve and sacrifice.

The question is, are we willing? Are we willing to have our hearts renewed by the Holy Spirit? Are we willing to be moved beyond our stubborn nature? Are we willing to let the Holy Spirit transform us into a life of humility with hearts that beat for others? Are we willing?

When it comes to healthy relationships it's the little things that make a big difference. So consider these two things -- touch and laughter.

If we are disconnected with someone, then reconnecting is the first step towards wholeness. Everyone needs to be touched. It's wired into us. We need physical contact. We shake hands, we hug, we high-five, we pat someone on the shoulder, we do the fist bump. These things are more important than we might realize; it is healing.

Premature babies who are touched have a 47% increase in weight gain and went home, on the average, six days earlier than infants who were not. Touch is important for healthy relationships.

The second thing is laughter. Find something that makes you laugh with your spouse, your friends, your key relationships. Laughter is good medicine. It's true! Laughter releases endorphins in our systems that encourage healing. Jay Leno once said that it's difficult to stay angry with someone when you laugh together. We often take ourselves too seriously. Laughter helps us cope with difficult situations. Laughter helps move us beyond ourselves to beat in tune with those around us.

Valentine's Day is coming, how are you going to show your love for the important people in your life?

Might I suggest you take the ultimate Love Dare and let your heart beat for the things that matter to God. Become a servant for the people in your life and life takes on a whole new meaning and direction. Are you willing? Happy Valentine's Day! Amen.