

Greater Love

The uniting of Ben & Alex Zemple – August 6, 2011

by Pastor Jim Rademaker

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)

In an article entitled "Exposed!" Gary Thomas writes ... I've always thought of myself as reasonably patient and charitable - that is, until I got married and discovered how passionately annoyed I can become at pulling out empty ice cube trays. When I grew up, my family had a simple rule: If you take out an ice cube, you refill the tray before you put it back in the freezer. Now I'll pull out a tray and find nothing more than half an ice cube.

It was amazing how much that small detail irritated me. I asked my wife, Lisa, "How much do you love me?" "More than all the world," she professed. "I don't need you to love me that much," I said. "I just want you to love me for seven seconds." "What on earth are you talking about?" "Well, I timed how long it takes to fill an ice cube tray and discovered it's just seven sec—" "Oh Gary, are we back to that again?"

It finally dawned on me that if it takes Lisa just seven seconds to fill an ice cube tray, *that's all it takes me as well*. Was I really so selfish that I was willing to let seven seconds' worth of inconvenience become a serious issue in my marriage? Was my capacity to show charity really that limited? Indeed it was.

That's the day I discovered the truth about marriage: Marriage holds up a mirror to my sin. It forces me to face myself honestly and consider my character flaws, selfishness, and anti-Christian attitudes - even with something as trivial as ice cube trays.

Being so close to someone - which marriage necessitates - is one of the greatest spiritual challenges in the world. And at times, you might feel like running away. But there's an alternative to running away. You can run to the cross, where you'll find mercy and forgiveness. One who loved you enough, that while you were yet sinful, He died for you. One who will help you love - as you have been loved by Him.

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C.S. Lewis writes about this "Greater Love" and the difference between merely "*being in love*" and love itself and what to do when you've (as the song goes) "*lost that loving feeling ... oh, that loving feeling*". "Ceasing to be 'in love' need not mean ceasing to love. Love in this second sense - *love* as distinct from 'being in love' - is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by (in Christian marriages) the grace which both partners ask, and receive, from God.

They can have this *love* for each other even at those moments when they do not *like* each other; as you *love* yourself even when you do not *like* yourself. They can retain this *love* even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be 'in love' with someone else. 'Being in love' first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter *love* enables them to keep the promise." (*Mere Christianity*)

Ben, God calls you to this Greater Love, to lay down your life for Alex. In Ephesians 5 it's called *headship*. A servant leadership - serving Alex as Jesus has served you - to the point of giving His life for you (*or sometimes it might simply mean just filling the ice cube tray for her*).

Alex, as Ben's wife you are to give your life for him - not because you "have to" or "feel" like it, but because you "choose to" ... out of reverence for Christ. The more you grow in Christ and his love, the more that love will be reflected in your love for Ben and the more your relationship with him will become one of the most treasured of possessions in life.

Dr. Michael Horton, speaking of nourishment for marriage, writes: "Do you realize that if you heard sermons on how to save your marriage and make it better every week that your marriage would probably fall apart? What you really need to hear about is JESUS CHRIST and be fed on Him so that you have nourishment for your marriage and for everything else in life throughout the week."

"We love ... because He first loved us." (1 John 3)

To love like this does not come naturally. It begins at the Cross and takes a lifetime of learning. Learning to love - in good times and bad, in prosperity or poverty, in sickness and in health - until death do you part. Continue to grow in Christ and you will *grow in love*.