

Face Time

The Intentional Attention of Love

January 8, 2022

Today we're learning to love the Lord by life-hacking our human heart! So let's start with *the* key question: **Are you in love with the Lord?** And *don't lie!* That won't get us anywhere! *That* just puts you in an unhappy relationship – and *that's* the *last* thing God wants! And if we're *honest*, perfect God is not *naturally* sinful humanity's *favorite* person; the life and death of Jesus proved that to all of us! So *know* that it's okay to say, "I want to love Him, but I'm just not there yet..."



After all, as every married person in this room can tell you, love takes effort! **Love doesn't happen to you, it happens through you.** Which is a bummer to everyone who thought being swept off their feet *also* meant love would be more of a *piggy-back ride* than a bicycle built for two. But **love means pushing the pedals and working up a sweat to get you and your loved one where you both want to go.**

Now psychologists, philosophers, and poets have been *dissecting* and *defining* love since the beginning of time, but for our purposes, we're going to focus on five specific *steps* to true love: **AWARENESS, CONNECTION, INTIMACY, TRUST, and VALUE.** Because to go from strangers to *soulmates*, every relationship must scale *these* stairs. And *without* each one, every relationship is susceptible to stumbling on a slippery slope. So, which step trips you up?

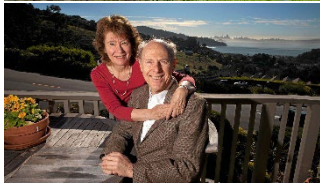
Well, Last week, Bruce suggested seven New Year's resolutions to see where we each might need to work on ourselves – and I got a perfect score! I've got the whole boatload of anger, greed, lust, envy, sloth, pride, and gluttony still stuck on my island!

But, as I began to ponder my predicament to make a plan of action, I immediately noticed the whole crew shared a common characteristic; they're all fed by a focus on *ourselves!* But as *convicting* as that *is*, we ought to see it as equally *encouraging!* Because **if self-centeredness is the common cause of our problems – getting our eyes off ourselves is our common cure!** *Here's how it works:* By just shifting our focus to someone *else*, *awareness*, *connection*, *intimacy*, *trust*, and *value* are all *naturally* set in *motion* to build the one *emotion* that cures all conditions; *love.*

[Because] Love covers over a multitude of sins. – 1 Peter 4:8 NIV

"*But you just said love was a sweaty bike ride full of effort – now it's just a matter of giving someone else our attention?*" Well yes. And *no.* It's not *just* giving, but *sustaining* our attention. And **giving attention isn't hard, sustaining it is.**

You *give* your attention to every squirrel that moves through your field of view – but **sustaining that attention means moving you to shift your view** to *follow* the squirrel. And we prefer the effortless focus on ourselves, cuz it's where our attention *naturally* rests. So, *yes*, it takes surprising effort to push past the comfort and convenience that our own egos offer – but if you *can* get your eyes off yourself – love will happen on its own. And here's the best part: **it only takes four minutes!**



You see, over 25 years ago, psychologist Arthur Aron fell in love and started studying how it works. And by experimentation, he succeeded in making two people fall in love in his laboratory. Six months later, they invited the whole lab to their wedding. And what was Arthur's big secret? **Four minutes of uninterrupted eye contact.** Since then, many people have recreated the experience with crazy results including Amnesty international, who wanted to show how humans should connect beyond our borders. So, keep in mind these people have never met before and watch what a little face time can do. [VIDEO]

Now, that's the power of the eye contact alone, but before the four minutes of sustained staring, Dr. Aron's *original* procedure also involves taking turns asking and answering 36 increasingly personal questions. So do you think you have the willpower to sustain that kind of attention; three dozen questions and a four-minute staring contest? Good - cuz **that's your assignment this week – go fall in love! Or else!** I've attached the questions so all you have to do is grab someone and find the answers. And then find a measly four minutes. And why have I become such a militant romantic? Well, our lives depend on it!

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. [But –]
Anyone who does *not* love remains in *death*. – 1 John 3:14 NIV

So in case it's never been made crystal clear – **every page, purpose, and plan in Christianity is focused on one very real thing that we could accomplish everyday but rarely do... loving.**

For the *entire law* is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [Love conquers all! Bible included!] – Galatians 5:14 NIV

[Which also means] Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does *not* know God, because God *is* love. – 1 John 4:7-8 NIV

There's a sobering truth! Your love of others corresponds to how well you know God? *Uh-oh!* Cuz based on social media posts *alone*, churches are *filled* with people who *barely* know the thing they *think* they're worshipping! *But not us!* Today, **we're raising our intention to sustain our attention to begin our ascension up the steps to true love!** But, *before* you pick the person to be your partner in this week's *laboratory* of love – let's walk the steps together, to see what to expect. Cuz it all *starts* with *who* you choose! And it can be anyone – spouse, stranger, friend, or foe!

Because there is such unbelievable complexity, purpose, and goodness hidden in every inch of creation – **that if you just look long enough, you'll see what's lovable about everything.** And first steps don't get much easier, because the moment we decide *where* to direct our attention – we've already started the process. Because simply **adding intention to our attention creates awareness.** And awareness gives us the key ingredient to love: something to focus our attention *upon*. That's why David *expected* to see big things after he committed to *his* sustained look at the Lord's *law*:



I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways... Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law. – Psalms 119:15, 18 NKJ

But nothing *happens* by awareness *alone*, we need *ongoing* attention, and it takes action to steadily *study*, *inquire* and *engage* our subject. Which starts as simply as finding four minutes of face time. Cuz **when we add action to our awareness, we create connection** and take our second step. And connection is where the *relationship* begins. Because as you engage, your actions become *interactions* and the relationship that forms becomes a part of who you are and what you do:

[Like Paul says:] Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or *seen* in me—put it into *practice*. And the God of peace will be with you. – Philippians 4:9 NIV



But how long does it take someone looking at *you* – before you become self-conscious? Well, *that's* when we'll instinctually put on a false front to protect the true you. Problem is, *that* can compromise a connection cuz **you can't have a real relationship with a fake friend.** So if you want to take it to the next level, the next step is being *intentionally* truthful because **when we add honesty to connection, we experience intimacy.** And boy does sustained face time tie our hands from hiding our flaws! Cuz the longer the look, the more we feel exposed. But that's okay, **because being exposed is just involuntary honesty** – and that's a good start.

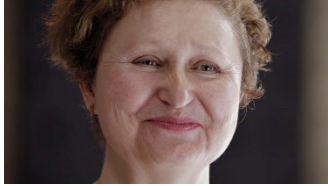
Like it or not, it creates comfort with our true selves, warts and all – and empowers us to make real relationships in spite of our self-consciousness. So, remember that:

Nothing in all creation is hidden from *God's* sight... – Hebrews 4:13 NIV

[Know you're exposed – then you don't have to worry about hiding your flaws, and you can] Come near to God and He will come near to you. **[And you'll be willing to]** Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. – James 4:8 NIV

Because as comfort grows, we learn **intimacy is only limited by what we allow each other to see.** So if we want others to drop their defenses for a better look, we gotta drop ours first. And to grow that comfort in the next step, we need to offer our *voluntary* honesty; aka being vulnerable. Because **when we add vulnerability to intimacy, we build trust.** And that's when the tears begin. At *that* point, you've seen each other's imperfections and now, you actually *want* to share and confess them cuz **trust turns flaws into opportunities to receive the help you know you need:**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, **[why?]** and He will make your paths *straight*. – Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV



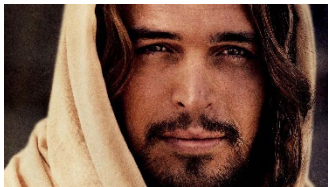
And the more defenseless facetime you log with a partner you *trust*, the more they *shape, change, and help* you to become the person you *want* to be. And when you begin to **feel** that you're *getting* something out of *giving your* attention, it changes how you *feel* about *trustworthy* things. And **when we add emotion to trust, we create value.**

Thank heavens my wife was willing to see the value in my trust – cuz that's what changed her perspective enough to be attracted to *this!* But just think about all the things trust makes us feel; calm, confident, thankful, optimistic, accepted, or as we say these days, "seen".

[Look how David felt:] When I am *afraid*, I put my trust in You. In God, whose Word I praise— in God I trust and am *not* afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? – Psalms 56:3-4 NIV

Trust makes us feel the *value* of another person, and right there – **when we add value to others, we create love.** Because we *appreciate, enjoy, respect, identify with, care for,* and deeply *desire* the things we *value*. **In other words, we love them!**

[Like Paul explained in his command:] Make my joy *complete* by being like-minded, having the same love ... in humility value others above yourselves. – Philippians 2:2-3 NIV



So, at this point if you're wondering, "Is this church, or couples' therapy?" – let me be clear: *Yes*. Because **this life and this church only has one purpose – learning to love the Lord.** We're *here* to reconcile the *relationship* so we can move back in with our true love! And in case you haven't caught it yet – loving each *other* is how we love *Him*.

Meaning – He'll be behind the eyes of whoever gets your four-minute facetime. Because:

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one *another*, God lives in us and His love is made *complete* in us... This is *how* love is made complete among us ... In this world *we* are like Jesus. – 1 John 4:12, 17 NIV

You *are* the body of Christ, and each one of *you* is a part of it. – 1 Corinthians 12:27 NIV

[Which is why Jesus says] Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for *Me*. – Matthew 25:40 NIV

[And] If you really know *Me*, you will know My Father as well. **[So, if you're playing your part in His body]** From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him." – John 14:7 NIV

So how much do you love the Lord? Well how much do you love others?

It's an easy equation with an uneasy answer – so thank the Lord it comes with a quick fix! Just **increase the attention you're giving with a little intention in your living!** Because facetime only happens when you choose to take the time to make the effort to start the steps to find true love! And hey – you've *got* four minutes to spare, so pick a partner and let God take it from there![XXX]

Answer these 36 questions with your partner:

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?
3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you will say? Why?
4. What would constitute a “perfect” day for you?
5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
6. If you could live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
11. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?
13. What would you want to know if a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else?
14. Is there something that you’ve dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven’t you done it?
15. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
16. What do you value most in a friendship?
17. What is your most treasured memory?
18. What is your most terrible memory?
19. If you knew that in one year you’d die suddenly, would you change the way you live now? Why?
20. What does friendship mean to you?
21. What roles do love and affection play in your life?
22. Alternate talking about something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Name a total of five items.
23. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other’s?
24. How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?
25. Make three factual “we” statements each. For instance, “We are both in this room feeling ... “
26. Complete this sentence: “I wish I had someone with whom I could speak ... “
27. To become a close friend with your partner, explain what would be vital for them to know.
28. Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things you might not say to someone you’ve just met.
29. Tell your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
30. When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
31. Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
32. What, if anything, is too serious to joke about?
33. If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven’t you told them yet?
34. Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you can safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
35. Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
36. Tell a personal problem and ask your partner’s advice on how they might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect on how you seem to feel about your chosen problem.

Now, spend FOUR MINUTES of uninterrupted eye contact.