

Looking Inward

Jim Fleming, Counseling Pastor



Week of July 15, 2007

Palm Love

An intimate, thriving, smiling relationship is a constant balance **between too much and not enough**. “I want to be held closely but not be smothered.” “I want to be cared for without being treated like a child.” “I want to know you are here for me without intruding upon my solitude.” “I need my space but don’t want to be abandoned.” “I want my opinion to be respected but not to be made the Gospel.” “I want to be listened to but not fixed.” “I need to join you without losing myself.” “I want you to be a part of my life but not the center of my being.” “I want you to hold me tightly but with an open hand.” Those who sense this balance and seek it in relationships seem to find a depth and richness alongside others that sustains the bond.

To hold tightly as a sign of love means to be held in the palm of the hand, not in the fingers. Love, by nature, needs freedom to flourish. By freedom, I mean the absence of control, manipulation, fear, power. You may rest in the palm of our relationship. I will resist, when my fear rises, to guilt, shame, threaten you in any form to make you stay. Love’s heartbeat thumps out the tune entitled *Freely Choosing to Stay*. There’s no greater praise of love than for the other to stay close to us because they want to; they would have it no other way - they freely choose to remain. The palm of the hand is all that is needed to sustain such a love.

It’s when the fingers curl over the palm of our hand that fear and insecurity are winning the day. As one person told me, “I was so fearful of losing him that I clutched tighter and literally choked the relationship to death.” That’s the sad thing. Holding another in a death grip to “keep them where we want them” removes from the relationship the oxygen of freedom, which love must breathe to flourish. But, this undeniable truth is knocked to the side when fear is present. As our fears of being abandoned, being tricked, being deceived, being alone, being separated have their way with any of us, we choke - not live - life. Our twisting fingers echo the twisting of our soul in its search for the palm of the Creator’s hand. We never rest easy until this search is fulfilled.

Some of us mistake the other’s needy and controlling grip around us as love. **We mistake someone needing us for someone loving us.** One writer penned this thought: “It’s one thing to say: *I need you, therefore I love you*, and quite another to say: *I love you, therefore I need you*. Some of us can’t fathom someone loving us just for who we are. We believe that we are only lovable for what we can do for another person. Someone pulling on us, using us, sucking the life from us is mistaken for “the love we’ve always been searching for.” Then, one day, to our horror, we can’t breathe. *And, it’s that day that we long for a love that holds us differently - that holds us tightly in the palm of the hand.*

Such is God’s love for us as described by Christ. It’s a “palm” love. It’s a deep love that our soul remains restless for until it drinks from its well. Nothing can kidnap us from the palm of God’s hand, but we are always free to climb out of it. And, when we do, the palm never turns into the back of God’s hand. The position of God’s hand never changes. It’s a love that understands that we must be free to leave if we are to be free to stay. All other hands that hold us, no matter how freely or lovingly, can never quench our soul’s thirst for its Creator’s hand. All others are pointers, not the destination of our soul’s longing.

Most of us pay little or no attention to how we hold one another until there’s a disturbance - *the balance between too much and too little is brought to our attention*. Our heart pounds. Our anger flares. Our anxiety surfaces in old, familiar ways. However uncomfortable it may be, we are presented with an opportunity to adjust our hold, our touch, our connection with our significant other. And, God gives us the room, space, and freedom to mature our love for one another. It becomes natural to give this type of love to others as we feel the open palm of God’s hand beneath us...holding us tightly - holding us freely. And, our soul breathes that deep breath we’ve longed for during our darkest nights. We love freely. Such is a “palm” love.

Ongoing Support Groups

- **Divorce Recovery Group** meets Thursdays 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. in room 159. Non-church members are welcome.
- **Grief Support Group** meets Mondays 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. in room 159.

To participate in either group or for additional information, please contact Counseling Pastor Jim Fleming at 893-2201, x 230. Brochures are available in the church reception area.

Dr. Fleming’s Looking Inward articles are also appear in our Sunday to Sunday weekly announcements and the monthly *Reflections* newsletter.