

Paul Solomon Lectures

Unconditional Love

The Unconditional Love Workshop

What Love Is Not

As we talk about love this weekend, we will be examining the many expressions which love takes. We will explore love, not as a sentiment or an emotion, because that is what love is not. We will explore love as an energy, a power and a force, because that is what love is.

We have already talked about love as a survival need, just as important as the basic needs of air, food, water, sunlight and shelter. In our great quest to fulfill this personal need for love, we develop relationships, because we are relational beings and relationships provide us a means and a place to discover and "capture" love.

There is a wonderful story about a fish that overhears a conversation between two people on the riverbank. They are discussing this mysterious and magical thing called "water." The fish decides to devote the rest of its life in search of the wondrous, but allusive water. He swims away, leaving all behind. After many, many years he returns, and everyone wants to know, "Did you find the wondrous thing called water?" The wisened fish answers, "Yes," and swims away.

In our own experience, we may choose to search for love and accept nothing less in its place, devoting our own lives to its pursuit and its expression. Or we may decide to settle for substitutes for love. Those are all the things that people do in our relationships with them that sort of appear loving, but are definitely not loving - all the words and actions that wear a love disguise. Of course, in order to accept the love disguises, we cannot blow the whistle on them. And that is part of what we term the "Great Conspiracy" - pretending that we are being loving to each other, when we are not.

Let's look at some of these love disguises. Let's look at dishonesty disguised as love. One of the most powerful examples of dishonesty as a disguise of love is when somebody is doing something that we know is destructive to themselves or to others, and we pretend that they are not doing it. We withhold the truth from them, and we call that being nice to them. When the people who really love them are trying to hold them responsible to truth, we sabotage that by being "nice" and allowing them to continue the action. "I won't tell you what you're doing. I'll be nice, so you'll like me." It is dishonesty disguised as love. It is not loving. It is not even supportive. It is destructive. It is being a "nice guy" at the cost of truth.

Dishonesty disguised as love produces permissive parents. "I'll never punish you. I'll never discipline you. I'll never say you're wrong. I'll never call you on your destructive habits. And, that way, I think you'll like me." The interesting thing is - you will not. You will not even respect me, because you will know that I am dishonest. You will buy into the Conspiracy by blaming me, and what you will blame me for is the fact that I did not call you on the Conspiracy. You will not respect me, and you will not love me. And I will not find out what love is. I will settle for dishonesty. I may be nice to be around. But what that really means is I am easy to ignore. I never call you on what you are doing that is destructive to you or to our relationship.

The other side of that is, in attempting to be honest I can be cruel. I can be so determined to make you aware of what you are doing, that I forget to be kind. I can believe that what you are doing is wrong, and I can blame you. Being honest means being absolutely honest. I will not pretend that you are doing the right

thing, the effective thing when you are not. I will not force you to fit into my beliefs of right and wrong by using guilt to manipulate you.

When an individual makes an agreement of responsibility and then avoids that responsibility for whatever reason, people who love that person will point out to him what he is doing. People who do not love him will run over to him and support his negativity, which helps him justify not acting responsibly. Those people are dishonest. They are not respecting him. They are not supporting him. They are not helping him. They are destroying him; participating in destruction and dishonesty. But they are nice to him. Other people who also do not love him may go over to him, and say, "Look what you are doing is atrocious; it's terrible. You jerk, look at the trouble you are causing us." That is also not helpful.

Just calling it what is - that is helpful. We call it naming the name. And that is as simple as. "I notice what you are doing, and that is alright. I will support you in doing that, but I do notice. And I know that you know, too." That is all you have to say.

I can even do it with a look that says, "I notice." I may not have to say a word. I am not going to make you wrong. I am not going to accuse you. I don't want to make you feel guilty. You will do that all by yourself, if you want to, and I will not have to say a word. In fact, all I have to do is be. I don't even have to be in your presence. I can be across town. But you know that I am not going to lie to you because my very existence is honest. If I am honest, I do not have to do anything. The fact that you know that I will call you on what you are doing, and that I will not lie to you is enough." That is love.

People who relate in this way are real friends. And the best parents relate to their children in this way. Just a look can be all a child needs to recognize "I am your parent. I support you. I believe in you. I want to help you find the actions that will support life and love in you. I do not want to make you wrong. I do not want to make you feel guilty. And I want you to know that I know what you are doing." Consistent communication of this nature will build such a bond between parents and their children that children will often correct their behavior just because they respect the wishes and wisdom of the parent. That is love.

Real existence is honesty. Denial supports what is not. Avoidance supports what is not. Avoidance and denial are dishonest. Remember, though, that love, and supporting what is, does not mean that you have to make others wrong, or that you have to tell them every time they are doing something you judge to be wrong. It just means that you have to be an example for recognizing what it is, being willing to live with their action, and supporting them even if they are not supporting themselves.

You know it is really working when a person avoids you because they are doing something that you both know is counter-productive. They know that if they brought it up to you, you'd tell them straight. You know that they know it because that is why they are avoiding you. And so all you have to do is be. And when you see that they are hurting a lot, then you go to them and say, "It's alright for you to do something else now. If you would like to play this game differently and have some fun in a different way, let us do it a different way now." And you can be supportive without condemning, without criticizing, without judging. Just make suggestions for a different way to play this game for the moment.

Here is one of the best illustrations of it. If I get mad at a group of individuals, and everybody else is happy and being supportive to the group, I will go off in a corner to be alone. If I notice that someone else is also unhappy, I will go to him or her. We will support each other's unhappiness, but we will avoid the group, and we will talk about the group and we will make the group wrong. But when that other person is back in the group, I can't do that any more. I either have to confront the group or be alone. Now just by rejoining the group, it appears the other person condemned me or judged me or criticized me. What he really did was make me face my self. And he didn't have to do anything to me; he just did something for himself.

We just don't go to people that we know are going to tell us that what we are doing is ineffective. If we don't want to face what we are doing, we don't go to the people who will tell us. Because we know they will tell us, we have enough sense to avoid them. We already know what the answer is, so we don't need or want to be told. What we do need is someone who is honest enough and loving enough to just be. And their being, and their willingness to support our negativity, is sufficient to help us face our negativity. If we knew, that when an individual is out of sorts he is going to support our negativity, then we make a conspiracy with that person, and then we can be negative together. But we can't do that without wanting to. We are so conscious that we know exactly which people to pick out. We do it consciously; we do it on purpose, which is the nature of the game.

Leeching Disguised as Love

Another commonly used disguise of love is leeching. I am leeching from you when I require you to be aware of my presence and to feed the fact that I am alive in order for me to be satisfied in being with you. I can't stand it if you are not giving me attention. That is leeching. It is very draining if you are the person being leeched, and you resist. It steals your attention and your energy. However, if you feed me because you want to, you won't be drained, even though I will still be leeching.

I leech when I try to take life force from you. I do it by making myself so important in your presence that you cannot ignore me. And I can do that in many ways: I can do it by complaining; I can do it by showing off; I can do it by being entertaining. I can do it by anything that requires that you be actively attentive to my presence. And the second you are not, I find something else to get your attention back again. It can be negative or it can be positive. But either way, it can be leeching.

There are so few people in our culture who have grown up knowing it is alright to be loved. Most people are love starved. We have been taught in our culture, especially fathers, especially men, that it is not masculine to love, to express love. And so men take it for granted that others know that they love them without ever really saying it or without being warm enough to show it. As a result, we have children growing up who have never felt absolutely sure that they are loved. So they enter relationships that they think are love relationships when what they are really looking for is someone else to prove their own lovability. If I don't love myself, I have a great need to be loved. And when I enter a love relationship, I'm going to be trying to get you to prove that you love me constantly, which puts a drain on the relationship.

Look at almost any marriage, and you will find the drain going on one way or the other. One of the partners is not sure he is loved, and he is constantly doing things to get the other to prove their love.

Leeching in love relationships usually comes from the fact that I haven't found myself worth. I haven't found myself lovable. I want to find someone who loves me, and get him to love me to prove that I am lovable, and so I take from someone else what I don't have, and I think that in taking it, I give, but instead, it becomes a drain.

Being Needed Disguised As Love

The opposite side of leeching is the person who is constantly giving, which is also one of love's disguises. When I am constantly giving, I don't have to get your attention to be with you. If I'm a giving person, I will give you my attention constantly, and as a result, you will want me around you. I am supporting your ego and your own need for attention. It is not any more appropriate than leeching because it springs from my own needs. I have a need to be needed, and the only way that I can "love" you is to know that you need me.

This kind of giving really looks like love. And we buy into it in this culture by validating people who need to be needed, because we know we can leech from them. These people are giving people -- giving, giving, giving -- and they appear wonderful and loving, but only to leeches, and only while we are leeching. They do not draw on our presence and exhaust us. Instead, they feed us. And, while doing so, they are dishonest because they are denying themselves in order to support us. Parents do that to children. Lovers do that to each other. Teachers do that to students. Partners do that to each other. And each one who leeches or allows himself to be leeched has bought into the Conspiracy.

It is alright to continue to do it, if you know you're doing it. When you admit it to yourself or to another, it is called rending the veil. That is all you have to do. You don't have to stop doing what you are doing. In fact, if you try to stop leeching by saying, "I'm never going to do that again," it won't work. You will empower leeching by trying not to do it. What you want to do is become conscious of what you are doing and admit it, own it, and then the power will go out of it because you will notice every time you are doing it, and you won't be able to sustain it. You won't be able to pretend anymore. The thing that maintains the Great Conspiracy is the pretense.

Passion Disguised As Love

Passion often disguises itself as love. When I see you, and you are beautiful and I get sexually aroused, then I think "I love you." It isn't love. It is an opportunity for passionate, physical involvement with another person, which can be very enjoyable, but should be called exactly what it is, passionate, physical participation with another person. And if we have that with a person we love, it adds a dimension of expression to the love, but it isn't love, and it shouldn't replace love.

If I see in you the potential for arousing my passions to a very high degree and I say, "I love you" "You turn me on," I can also encounter another one of these childish syndromes that we go through which says, "I cannot stand to be deprived of something I want. I can't do it. I can't help myself. You have to love me. I'll be in torment if you don't. I can't help loving you. I just can't control myself, even though I know I should." That's blind passion. It isn't love. It has nothing to do with love. But we can express love passionately.

If you "can't help it," realize that you had better help it or you will never be alive. It will deny you the ability to make a decision. Release your passion because you decide to, and release it where you want to. And where passion is aroused elsewhere, know that there is a potential for denying your creativity, decision, purpose and participation. Can you imagine anything worse than your body just "going off" without your participation? It is just doing its thing without your guidance. That does not give you life. It is depriving you of life. The fact that it can only be released in that relationship deprives you of a range of choices and the fullness of what life is.

Passion is the energy that you put into a physical act or an expression of love or emotion. Doing it passionately is doing it with abandon, without reservation, releasing your total energy. Do it, but with conscious participation.

Make decisions; take responsibility for the fact that you make decisions. Don't let yourself say, "I don't have a choice. I couldn't help it." If you do that, you are dead. You are denying your reality. You are denying your Christhood. You can't be Christ without making choices. That is what Christ is - the creator, the chooser, the decider. And you can be that.

Protectiveness Disguised As Love

Protectiveness means that I try to protect you from yourself and everything in your environment. The important thing to notice about protectiveness is why I do it. It is done for the purpose of proving how important I am and how indispensable I am.

Protectiveness is most often done by parents with children, but it is also practiced in other relationships, such as by men with women and by motherly women who marry "sons." Our protectiveness tries to protect individuals from sadness, from harm, from mistakes and we call that "love." It is not love when it creates a limitation of the other person's experience of life. It can be extremely damaging. But it can also be helpful, such as when our protectiveness becomes a device for teaching a person how to protect himself. If we do it successfully, they will become independent, and they won't need us anymore. Which can be a horrible moment, unless we are alright without them.

The purpose of protectiveness is to make myself important. "You need me for protection." Security is an illusion. No matter how good a parent you are, you cannot ensure that your children will survive up to adulthood. There are so many things that parents cannot control. Children will do what they are going to do, in spite of us, rather than because of us. We do not have the control over other people's lives that we like to think we do. But we can be very protective in order to maintain the illusion that we do. It is part of the Conspiracy.

It is alright to be protective as long as we don't destroy the other person's options in doing that, and insofar as we are alright with the other person coming to a point where they no longer need us. Over protection keeps the other person from growing, keeps them where they are.

Remember that none of these disguises are love. Some of them are functions of love, sometimes. None of them are wrong. They are all alright to do. What determines whether they are loving, whether they are serving or not, is whether we are doing them on purpose, consciously, with conscious participation. When we act by conscious choice, it is supportive, and it can work.

Ownership Disguised As Love

Ownership means parents owning children, husbands owning wives, and wives owning husbands. And in this society we give certificates of ownership to parents and to married people. The government supports it, so we can pretend that we own each other. You do not own your children. You do not own your husband or wife. And all of the rights that you maintain - the "shoulds" in your relationships - are restrictions and demands of ownership.

I don't own you. With that understanding we can make some agreements. If you willingly keep those agreements, we can enjoy love together. If you keep those agreements because I own you, because I have a license and because you should, then you become a slave not my lover, but my slave. I own you. That is true with parents and with children. That is true with husbands and wives. It is true with lovers. It is true with teachers and students.

Possessiveness Disguised As Love

Essentially, possessiveness is the same thing as ownership. It means being possessive of a person's attention. "I don't want you to have fun unless I'm the cause of it. If you leave my presence, promise me that you won't enjoy yourself. That means that you love me." This is not love.

What is an alternative to possessiveness? What can I do that does work? What works is when a person enjoys me because they want to, when a person loves me because they choose me. If I have a certificate that says, "You're obligated to love me," there will be no joy in our love.

I want you to stay with me only for as long as you totally enjoy being with me. I want to be with you only because I totally enjoy being with you. I want it to be a choice every second. When it gets into negativity, we have a fraud perpetuated by the government. It is not love.

Love will require you to be conscious. I want to make you happy every moment that I am with you to the extent that I can, and I want you to enjoy the moments that you are not with me. And if I am enjoyable enough, you will come back, and we will enjoy being together because you want to, not because you are supposed to and not because you are obligated to. I want us to be together because we want to be together. I sell my soul when I agree to be possessed in order to get your love.

Jealousy Disguised As Love

The result of possessiveness and ownership is jealousy. In fact, if you are not jealous, I won't believe that you love me. It is not love. Ron Smotherman in his book **Winning Through Enlightenment** says, "You can't have anything you are not willing to live without." That is what jealousy is all about. If I am not willing to live without you, then I will require you to be with me. I will try to own you, and I will use fear to maintain our relationship. That produces jealousy. There is no love in it. It is a relationship based on fear. And the result is that I will never have you; I will never have a relationship with you. What I experience is the fear of not having you. I never experience the joy of having you. The fear of not having you overrides the joy and becomes the working factor in the relationship.

Relationships are our point of reference for being alive. We only know we are alive by relating to things, by relating to ourselves, others and the environment. The way that we relate determines whether our aliveness is joy or hell.

Flattery Disguised As Love

One of the things that people do when they try to become conscious in relationships is think, "Gee, if I never criticize them, if I always praise them, then they are going to want me around." So I flatter them. I am not honest with my praise, and I never give criticism, just flattery. This goes back to the first disguise, dishonesty disguised as love. What that means is I am easy to ignore, and people only want me around when I am praising them, flattering them. What they want is the flattery or the praise, not me. If I am willing to be honest in a relationship, then I will become a tool for their recognition of reality, and they will have to have a real relationship with me. The truth is if you balance your praise with calling things what they are, people will respect that, and even when you are not doing that, people will know that you support reality and honesty and that you are willing to say what is going on. Then people will love and will change, will adapt and will support that.

In that case, nobody will take you for granted. People will love you and people will hate you. Whichever they do, they will do it with passion, if you are real. And if you are willing to live with that, you get to be real.

People will only treat you as you have taught them to treat you. You teach them how to treat you by consistently responding in a certain way to the way they treat you. If you teach them that a certain word or certain look gets a response out of you, you have taught them to use that word or that response or that look, and they will do it. Some people are susceptible to flattery. What they are teaching you is that is how

to relate to them. Some people are very susceptible to manipulation. They will teach you to manipulate them. Some people are very responsive to possessiveness in relationships.

You teach others how to treat you. I may teach people that the only way to get my attention is to brutalize me. Then I get to be a martyr and blame you. I taught you how to relate to me. Now, if I try to teach you that something is not acceptable in our relationship, it won't be done by my protesting that you are treating me that way, it won't work for me to jump up and down and scream and say, "I won't put up with this." What will work is to leave. Don't be there when a person is doing something that is unacceptable in your relationship. Don't rant and rave about it. Don't say anything. Just don't be there. They will get the message. If you leave every time they do that, they will stop doing it.

Now, a child may want punishment. If that is the only form of concentrated attention they ever get, they will do anything to get punishment, and then it becomes a reward. That doesn't necessarily mean ignore them. That means that you need to be conscious enough to notice that it is attention that they are trying to get. If you don't want that action linked to that response, make sure that is not what you give them. Whatever it is they want, don't give it in that moment unless you want them to do that every time they want it. Fill the need for attention at other times in positive ways.

"Don't be there" doesn't necessarily mean that you have to take the body away. "Don't be there" means don't let them get the response that they are looking for. If a person is trying to make you angry, don't teach them that that is the way to do it or they will do it every time they want to feel that sense of power over you. If I know that I am always triggered by your doing something in particular what I have to do is make sure that isn't true anymore and not be triggered when you do it. That means it won't work anymore. That means I don't get to buy into it anymore. His action doesn't work for him anymore because it doesn't trigger me anymore. It has no power. I will just diffuse it. It doesn't work. People won't do what doesn't work.

If you are uncomfortable and you feel that you are only suppressing your reaction, you can give an unexpected reaction. Respond differently. You can respond, but don't respond in the way that they expect you to. That teaches them not to try it next time. When you act in a predictable way, people will treat you in a predictable manner. They will treat you exactly how you have taught them to treat you.

The only thing we can be consistent with is being ourselves. Now if my self is only a tiny piece of the spectrum of what I can be, then I am very predictable. But I'm never my total self. And if I am consistent with being all of me, that means that what I am is totally unpredictable. I operate from all over the spectrum. Where I am on the spectrum at any given moment is my choice, not yours.

If I allow my life to be predicted by another, then what I get is lots of peaks and lots of valleys, lots of ups and downs, but I won't have a consistent joy of life because I am not willing to take responsibility for being consistently joyous. What I get is the opportunity to blame everybody out there for everything that is going on in my life. And that is alright. We are not talking about right or wrong or shoulds or shouldn'ts. We are talking about cause and effect. Am I willing to live consciously with what I have set in motion consciously?

The My Fair Lady Syndrome Disguised As Love

The story of "My Fair Lady" is one of a wealthy, powerful, highly educated gentleman who finds an attractive, but backward, underprivileged girl and takes her into society to teach her wonderful manners. It is also closely related to a syndrome called the "Knight in Shining Armor Syndrome." A friend tells a story of being an unhappy girl, underprivileged, unloved, and then being rescued by a knight in shining armor who looked very successful, very prosperous, very much in control.

She doesn't love him, but he took her in and she was grateful. She spent twenty years being grateful to him and not loving him. Then one day, she discovered that it wasn't love and that she wasn't grateful anymore. His heart was broken. He didn't know that it wasn't love for him either. He was experiencing gratitude instead of love. He was experiencing her support for his being the knight in shining armor. And everybody else agreed, "Boy, is she lucky to have him," they said. Poor guy. Poor lady.

We can do things that look like love that aren't loving at all. I can be your white knight and I can look terribly unselfish by sacrificing myself for you. I can do all these wonderful things to you and appear unselfish while all of the time I am doing it for me. And the extent to which you meet my expectations I get gratitude, respect, appreciation, but not love.

It is also called the Aquarian Syndrome. It rules some of the people who go out and open drug rehabilitation centers. They are knights in shining armor for society, and their worth is measured by whether or not they save society. They look very loving. It can be a function of love. It is very serving. It gets gratitude and recognition, praise and appreciation, trophies and awards; but not love. People don't love you because they need you. People don't love you because you are meeting their needs. People don't love you because you are supporting them. People love you only if they choose to.

The Provider Disguised As Love

The provider is the person who is responsible for your survival. And, by God, you better love and appreciate that. The truth is that you cannot love it. You can appreciate it, and that is not the same as love.

You will never love anybody because they are providing for you. If you really love them, it will be because they are who they are. It will be loving who they are, not the fact that they are providing. And if they stop providing, you will still love them. But appreciation goes only as long as the meal ticket is delivered. And it is alright. A good cause/effect relationship is appreciation of the things that people do for you. But don't call it love. You can't love the provider until you are meeting your own needs and until that person is no longer needed as the provider. Then, that person can give to you, but not to get your love and not because you need it. That person can provide for you because he or she wants to and because you enjoy accepting it. When you establish your independence and love that person anyway, you will experience love.

One of the techniques that we use to get love is to meet other people's needs and at the same time, to make sure that they understand how needy they are and how benevolent we are. How loving is that?

"Don't you realize how much you need me? I mean, don't you realize what poverty you are living in? Don't you realize how much you need my support so you can survive? Don't you realize how little you have and how unworthy you are. Can't you appreciate me for what I am giving you?"

How do all of those questions make you feel? Do they make you feel loved or do they make you feel resentful and unworthy?

Maybe you can feel grateful, maybe appreciative, but not loving or loved. You only love when you choose to. Love does not occur when you are supposed to or when you owe it or because it is an obligation. Love is a choice and it only occurs as a result of choice. You cannot love who and what you need. If you want to love someone that you need, you are going to have to stop needing them first. Then, you can choose to love them. Get over your need, and then make a choice.

Only then will it be a choice. You might not make the same choice that they thought you would. That is alright because you won't need them. You won't have to please them. They are not the provider anymore.

They are not the provider of your alrightness, not the provider of love. If you need them to fit these needs, then you haven't found a source sufficient within yourself. And if you can't love yourself sufficiently, you won't be able to love another.

If you find yourself in such a situation, demonstrate to yourself that you can live without the external source of support. Then choose to love, not because of need, but because of choice. You can only do that after you prove that you can live without it. And you don't have to do anything to prove that you can live with it. You only have to become conscious and examine your need.

Vicarious Living Disguised As Love

This is most often done by parents with children. It means that if my life is miserable, I will try to live vicariously through you. I will make you feel obligated to enjoy life so that proves how good I am. I will cancel out or postpone my living altogether to live through you. It means that I am trying to give you a burden that you cannot possibly manage, and you will resent me. You cannot successfully live vicariously. You cannot live through somebody else.

And again, vicarious living looks very unselfish. It looks very loving. When you are attempting to live vicariously through somebody else, you do many wonderful things for them but it is because you want to have a vicarious experience of their joy as the result of it. But they will not enjoy it because they will feel dependent. It will make you more important than they are. You become the provider of their needs, and they will resent that. Then, they will have to cut themselves off from you to be independent, and then you are going to be hurt.

Then, they may choose to love you, but you will only know it if you are willing to be alive yourself instead of living vicariously through them. Even when they turn around and love you, you won't know it unless you are willing to be alive.

Divorced couples often maintain their relationship vicariously through the children. I communicate my hate for you through the children; I communicate my love through the children. I am using them as a vicarious instrument for communication with you. And children can't handle it.

We cannot use others as a vehicle through which to experience the world. We can't do it. We can use another person as a point of reference for how well we are experiencing the world, but we cannot experience the world through them.

The Choice Is Yours

In examining all of these love disguises, the choice remains, that of being alive or dead. As long as we are using the disguises to try to experience what love is, we are dead. We are using substitutes for love. The only way we can be alive is to experience love instead of its substitutes. All of these things can serve as function of love. There is nothing wrong with vicariously experiencing another person's joy. There is nothing wrong with filling another's needs or even in seeking another to help to fulfill our needs. It can be very supportive to have a partnership relationship with another person. And it is fun to do. But if that is love to you and if that is all of life to you, then you have no life outside of it and you are not completely alive.

All these things that you can do are choices, used in a particular way, they can be expressions of love. But they are not love. They are what love is not, yet they can all be supportive forms of expression as you learn what love is.

