

# The Reward Of Love Is Relationship

The Word of God Series

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Good Morning. My name is Monte McCullough. I am one of the Elders here at Grace Hill Church. It is my joy to bring the Word to you today. Please turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 55. We will also have it on the screen, but here at Grace Hill, we want you to have it in front of you whether in book form or app form. We want you to see we are not changing it around to what we want it to say, but that we are reading straight from God's Word, the same one you have. Today I will be using the English Standard Version, which is the one we normally use here. Isaiah 55. We will get there eventually.

We have been in a series titled "The Word of God" and this is the last sermon in the series. My objective today is to give us the foundation and desire for pursuing God through His Word. I want to show that joy is found in relationship with God.

Do you find it difficult thinking of God's Word in these terms?

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul (Psalm 19:7)

The rules of the Lord are more to be desired than gold and sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10)

I delight in the law of God (Romans 7:22)

When most people think of reading the Bible, they are not thinking in these terms. Instead, we think of it more in the area of a learned discipline or duty in order to grow our Christian life. Last week our pastor Allan preached on the sufficiency of God's Word to give guidance and wisdom in every area of our life. He reminded us it is a process and we don't usually or normatively, get immediate answers to some questions we ask God. They are just not addressed in God's Word.

Should I take this job offer?

Should I marry this person?

Should I sell my home and buy one in a different location?

Or there are just a myriad of things that go on in life where we want to either hear from God about something or want to know why He has not answered or changed things for us.

For a year I prayed that God would cause me to fall back in love with my wife, Lori. When it did not happen in the time I wanted it to, I would ask God, why?! It is a good prayer. It is a right prayer. It is a prayer that is consistent with Your Word! What is the deal? Are You there? Do You care? What is wrong with this picture? Have you ever been there?

Well, this is what I hope to help us process today and see the treasure that the Word of God is and that it is a huge game changer in the lives of God's people.

Will you pray with me? Father, our greatest need is to know You. Many times we think other things at the moment are more important. We get anxious and troubled about many things. We see things through a paradigm of prioritization based on the events and decisions that need to be made today or right now. Visit us through Your Word today to show us that only one thing is important to give joy to our hearts. Challenge us each with a paradigm that places nothing in front of knowing You. Give us a heart that worships. Bless the preaching and hearing of Your Word to anyone who is listening to this time of worship. In, Christ's name – Amen

A couple weeks ago, my beautiful wife, Lori, and I were walking down the street in our neighborhood. We were going to Walgreens where there is a Red Box, you know, the thing that dispenses DVD's. While we were walking and talking we were holding hands. A woman driving a minivan was turning onto a street right in front of us and as she was turning, looked at us and smiled. You know, the smile that says, "That is so sweet." Well, I made the comment to Lori while we were walking, "That woman was just thinking, look at that old couple holding hands, that's so sweet." When I told Allan this story and that I might use it as an illustration, he said, "She was probably thinking, how did that old guy end up with that young woman?" I am not going to doubt that, but this is my example so, I will acknowledge that Lori is a beautiful woman who does not look like she would hook up with me, but she did, I am blessed. I'm moving on with the illustration.

When most, if not all of us, were thinking about getting married, this is one of the thoughts or visions we had about the one we would marry. We thought about growing old together and love getting better, each day getting better than the day before. We dreamed it would not wane but continue to grow. Now, I think most, if not all of us can look at life and see, that just isn't the way it is. We dream of that and desire that, but it just doesn't happen that way does it? When we are in love and can't get the person off our mind, well, we write songs and poems. We write letters or I guess now, texts that say some of the sweetest things. But, it gets to a point where it isn't getting better than the day before and the songs, poems and letters wane.

So how does a couple get to the place they have been married for 38 years and still want to hold hands and are in love?

Well, that answer is not what we are here for today, but it follows the exact same path for the answer that we are going to discuss and my personal belief is that this topic benefits and strengthens my marriage.

How does one fall in love with the LORD so much that HE is what drives our thoughts and actions? How does one get to the place where God's Word is like honey to the taste? Or, when we find Him through relationship, our hearts pant for Him as a deer pants for the water? We can't see life without Him. The Bible tells us that Job, after he finds out he has lost everything including his children, tears his clothes and falls to the ground, yet worships God. How do we get there? Some of us may think we don't want to get there.

It is a question I have wondered for years. I believe the Lord has given me a word on this in a way that does make sense to us and we desperately want to believe it, but struggle at best to get there. This is the reason that I gave the title to this sermon, "The Reward of Love is Relationship".

Think about it ... you and I look at relationships, whether marriage or friends, in the same vain that we desire love. We want that feeling of ecstasy or union that satisfies the heart and is the drive of our heart. The relationship has a huge benefit to us and gives us a feeling that all is well. When close relationships suffer, things in our world are just not so well anymore. There is worry, shame, judging one another, hardships, pressures to look ok and then pride takes hold of us and

we blame the other person. We look at it and say “What went wrong?” We become anxious and troubled by many things in our lives. But, if you have ever been in a relationship that has weathered the trials and difficulties and come out on the other end stronger because of reconciliation, love and relationship, you find that the relationship is the treasure, not the feeling of love. Relationship is the foundation that allows us to persevere.

Love is the engine that grows relationships, and relationship is the reward of that effort and perseverance. (repeat)

Lori and I went through several years of relationship struggle where I was not doing the effort and perseverance of love, but just coasting along expecting it to get better. I was not seeking divorce and of course it was all her fault as far as I was concerned. So, my short sightedness saw the reward as being love and not a relationship that weathers storms. Who wants storms? If there are going to be storms with this person I want out or I am not going to put my hopes and dreams in this relationship.

First of all, if you put your hopes in a relationship with another person who is fallible, then that hope will fail you. The first time you catch that person in a white lie or doing something they said they would not do or doing something you would not dream of them doing, that hope is damaged.

The same is true if you put your hopes in a god who is fallible. By this I mean that you have decided that if God were good He would and would not do certain things. You have decided who this god is. The minute something happens that you do not think God should do, that hope is damaged. You question God in what he does. You doubt.

When my hope turned to the God of the Bible, my hope became secure and has not waned. It has been challenged and caused me to seek God but has not waned. My heart became calmer and patient. Why? What do we see in God’s Word that will sustain that hope? God’s Word is where we find out who God IS and where we get to know Him. He has chosen to leave us this book that reveals Himself to us.

The Bible is a narrative about God. It is about HIM. It is not about you and me. We tend to look in the Bible for it to be about us. If God made a promise to someone, then it is for me as well. This is not the way we should approach the Bible. We should not be looking for ourselves in it's pages. If we are the center of the relationship, then that relationship will suffer because we are fallible people and we only love ourselves. The minute we do something wrong or someone else does something wrong, then we think God is now, in some way, against them or us. This approach and thinking causes our minds to put the Bible in a useless position.

You may say, "Monte, that sounds pretty limiting. God is bigger than that. I can't control God, how can I put His Word in a useless position because I am looking to it for answers. In fact, I have turned to the very thing we say I should be turning to for answers." We think that way don't we? God is bigger than me. Looking to His Word is where we should go. We can't control God. ... So what am I saying??

I am reminding us, that the Word of God is HIS revelation of who HE is. He has given us His story from beginning to end of how He pursues us so that we can have the greatest treasure our hearts and minds could dream of having. A relationship with God! With Him, the Creator! He created us for that!

Think about it. He made a garden, a paradise, and made man in His own image that man would reflect HIS glory, reflect HIM. He also gave man the freedom to choose to love and to desire Him. As far as Adam and Eve knew, there was no evil, the serpent must have been good, everything else was declared good. The fruit on the tree was even desirable and good for food. But God's Word and God Himself only become more desirable when you see the relationship in relation to who God is. The minute Adam and Eve went against the Word of God, they realized they had broken the relationship. They hid. The day before, they were walking through the garden with God! They knew God! Now they had chosen to be their own sovereign and to decide when God reigns and when He doesn't reign. This is to forget who God is and to be self-appointed as the one who decides what I want in a relationship that serves my needs now and doubt God quite understands my situation. I have now become anxious and troubled by many things. I am struggling to make it all work out while saying God is LORD.

God promises a Savior, one who will defeat evil and make all things new again. He promises that right when He confronts Adam and Eve and the serpent. He pursues humanity from the very beginning. He made us for relationship to Him.

The Bible tells us how God, in one unified story, is on a mission to fix the broken image bearing purpose that we as humans are supposed to reflect. All through the narrative we see that God is the one who continues to pursue. He not only gives humanity another chance, but a new start through the story of Noah, but humanity continues to choose to be their own sovereign.

He calls a people out of the man Abram (Abraham) and his wife Sarai (Sarah), through her 90 year old womb. All to show it is God and not humanity that can fix this broken image bearing responsibility. Abraham does have a son through Sarah and it was a miracle at their age. His family was a mess. But God was faithful in His promise that one day Abraham would bless all the families of the world.

Then we had Moses who led the Israelites, God's chosen people, from Egypt to the promised land. This was the land that God had promised Abraham that they would possess. God along the way has had Moses erect a tent, tabernacle where offerings can be made for the forgiveness of sins to reconcile God and His people. It also housed the Ark of the Covenant which was the place where God sat. It was God with the people. This whole story is also a mess where the Israelites choose who is sovereign over them and who isn't. Long story ... God puts a different generation in the promised land to give them a new chance. This ends up not going well either, the people no longer want God as their king, they want a king like all the other peoples of the earth. So, they have decided who will be sovereign once again.

God gives them a king who looks like a king to the people. Saul is the tallest and most commanding person in the land. But Saul wasn't a good king. So, God chooses a man after His own heart, David, a shepherd boy. Someone who has a relationship with God. He worships God. God renews His covenant and tells David that one day the King of kings will come from his bloodline. The one who will bless all the peoples of the earth and defeat evil. He will make all things new.

Solomon, David's son, is the next king of Israel is the one who builds the temple in Jerusalem which will house the Ark of the Covenant and the place of sacrifice and

worship. The tent, tabernacle and the temple were where the presence of God was with His people. It was God with us. All of this was by God's direction and design. Humanity rejected Him, and He pursues continually. This book is about God with us.

Next, God sends prophets to warn us to follow God and choose His ways. Humanity resists. God sends His only Son, born of a virgin. This is a complete act of God, just like Sarai, not possible otherwise. He did this to show He is the promised One who will defeat evil. Jesus lives a life that is obedient to God, perfect in every way, without sin. He lives a life with God consistently the sovereign of His life. He teaches men, disciples, how to follow God and what that looks like. He is the final, perfect sacrifice for humanity's sins. He dies on the cross, rejected by men, as atonement for those sins. Then He defeats death by resurrecting on the third day. This was God's will. He was the one to provide atonement. The Good News is that He has pursued us and provided that so that you and I can know Him and have this relationship that reflects Him to the world.

The Bible continues with those disciples trying to tell the Good News of this Gospel to everyone in the known world and giving the hope that comes from the relationship with God that is offered through the repaired image bearing responsibility we can have. Through the atonement of Christ we can now be a light that shines in the darkness and bears an image of God that tells who He is and what He has done. When He is your sovereign, you can, with confidence, be filled with joy that comes from no other relationship. The love that God is, that He fills you with, will yield and does yield a reward of relationship.

Now let's turn to Isaiah 55.

Isaiah 55:1-13 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> "Come, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.

John 7:37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.  
Come to relationship that satisfies.

Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.  
This is not something you earn. It is offered, and He is the one pursuing you.

<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.

John 6:27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.  
Jesus is the Bread of Life. Relationship with God is what satisfies and gives delight.

John 6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me;  
hear, that your soul may live;  
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.

<sup>4</sup> Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander for the peoples.

Jeremiah 32:40 I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

Ezekiel 37:26 I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore.

<sup>5</sup> Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,  
and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,

because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has glorified you.

God has offered and is the one who fixes the broken image bearing responsibility we have. He is the one who will cause your image bearing to reflect Him. He glorifies.

<sup>6</sup> “Seek the LORD while he may be found;  
call upon him while he is near;  
<sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Why would He not? He is the faithful one who has pursued and pursued, generation after generation. He made the way for us to be reconciled to Him.

<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.  
<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Do you not see that a Creator is higher than the creation? Do you question His ways? Would He not know what is best for you? Does He not know how to fix broken things? Is he not concerned for your anxieties and troubles?

<sup>10</sup> “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
<sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

God's Word is divine.

Isaiah 40:8

<sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

God's Word has the power that God has given it to convey and communicate to us. If we seek Him, not our own glory and gain, but Him, He will reveal himself. And what will be the result of finding Him?

<sup>12</sup> "For you shall go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall break forth into singing,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
<sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall make a name for the LORD,  
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Isaiah 35:10

<sup>10</sup> And the ransomed of the LORD shall return  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain gladness and joy,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The reward of this love that God has shown faithfully and relentlessly is a relationship with Him. He gave us this Word in its entirety to reveal who HE is. It is about Him. He is the Sovereign we were designed to follow, know and desire over anything His creation had to offer. We were designed to worship. Relationship with God, through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and receiving the indwelling of His Holy Spirit to comfort and to guide is the great reward of this relentless love we witness in this narrative. God with us.

You and I must preach this Good News to ourselves everyday or we are prone to wander, prone to follow a lower way that seems to make more sense. We will drift because our ways are not His ways. We must remind ourselves who He is and be with Him through His Word.

Now don't think I am saying that everyday with Jesus is sweeter than the day before. We tend to think that is what is being said and we know it just doesn't work that way. The Bible does not tell us that is how it will be while we are here waiting on the return of Jesus. It tells us we will experience suffering and hardship and persecutions. The Bible is clear on these things. But, He does promise to be with us. Relationship. He tells us storms will come, but if we hold fast to His teachings and follow Him, He is with us and will sustain us. Make sure you understand that He sustains, not our feelings and not our circumstances. He wants to give you a different paradigm than being anxious and troubled by many things. He wants you to have a relationship with Him. That is the one thing that is more important than anything else.

I would like to give you a great example and contrast of relationship that we have in the Bible. It is the story of Mary and Martha who were close friends of Jesus. Both were believers, but one had a relationship that was worship. Let me show you.

Luke 10:38-42

<sup>38</sup>Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. <sup>39</sup>And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. <sup>40</sup>But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." <sup>41</sup>But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, <sup>42</sup>but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Jesus was looking at their hearts. Most of us want to come to Martha's defense. But listen to what Jesus says about their hearts. Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. What one thing is that?

Then He said, Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. He wasn't saying you can't have her help, He was talking about the heart status. What is the one thing? What is the good portion?

John 11:5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. We know these people were special to Jesus. And this next section is after Lazarus has died. He is the brother of Mary and Martha.

John 11:17-45

<sup>17</sup>Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,<sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup>So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.<sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."<sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup>She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Martha is a believer.

<sup>28</sup>When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." <sup>29</sup>And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup>Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup>When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. <sup>32</sup>Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Mary falls at His feet ... quite a different posture before Jesus.

<sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. <sup>34</sup>And he

said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup>Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

When Jesus saw her weeping, He was deeply moved. He knows and cares about your storms.

<sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."

Martha questions what Jesus is doing, and her thoughts are much lower even though He has told her that He is the resurrection and the life. Her heart is doubting and remember, anxious and troubled by many things.

<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."

I believe that He said this for Martha, to strengthen her relationship with Him. I believe He is pursuing her. Others too, but He addressed her right before this.

<sup>43</sup>When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." <sup>44</sup>The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

<sup>45</sup>Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him

Many people who were with Mary and had heard from her about her relationship with Jesus, the Son of God, believed.

John 12:1-8

<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>So they gave a dinner

for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. <sup>3</sup>Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup>“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” <sup>6</sup>He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

Mary, once again has a posture of worship, Martha is serving and for all we know she is serving in a joyful relationship with Jesus, the Son of God. But Jesus once again acknowledges that what Mary has will not be taken from her. Leave her alone. He is with her and that is all that matters to Mary.

If your paradigm is seeking God and relationship with God through His provisions to make that happen, you will be rewarded with relationship. He will show you how He loves you through His Word. The reward of love is relationship. If your paradigm is one of just seeking answers to questions and relief from struggles (being anxious and troubled about many things), you are most likely looking for answers that make sense to you. Our ways are much lower than God’s and they won’t make sense to you. Here is the good news ... He does not intend to leave you in that lower state. Read this Bible, God’s Word. Look and see.

If there is anyone here who would like to know more about this relationship, or start this relationship, please come talk with me or any one of the leaders here at Grace Hill. Our purpose is to see lives transformed through knowing God.

When He is your sovereign, you can, with confidence, be filled with joy that comes from no other relationship. The love that God is, that He fills you with, will yield and does yield a reward of relationship.

Pray with me,