

Contact Tracing

On Sunday we continued explore what “life in the Spirit” looks like, focusing on the No. 1 “fruit of the Spirit,” *agape* love.

1. Warm-up Question: For you personally, what has been the most maddening part of Sheltering at Home? What has been the best part?
2. In a recent Ted Talk, police officer John Sutherland explained a concept in forensic science called Locard’s Exchange Principle, *i.e.*, every contact leaves a trace. Sutherland then applied that concept to ordinary human interaction, saying, “Every time two people come into contact with one another an exchange takes place. Whether between lifelong friends or passing strangers – we encourage, we ignore, we hold out a hand, or we withdraw it. We walk towards or we walk away. We bless or we curse. And every single contact leaves a trace.” Think of an interaction you had with someone today, even if very incidental. Did your interaction bless or curse?
3. C.S. Lewis said, “All your life long you are slowly turning [your spirit] either into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to one state or the other.” Think of a choice you made today, even if very incidental. Did it make you a little more heavenly or hellish?
4. When the Old Testament says the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation, that’s just another way of saying that every contact leaves a trace. Every choice we make, every interaction that occurs, makes both us and the people directly or indirectly impacted by us more or less eternally beautiful. That’s why it’s so important that we learn to be more loving. Read Galatians 5:16-25.
 - a. Before we turn our focus to the No. 1 fruit of the Spirit (*agape* love), let’s first think more broadly about this passage. When Paul refers to “life in the Spirit,” what kind of life do you envision? Describe what you think someone looks like when they’re “living in the Spirit.”
 - b. What does verse 18 mean when it says, “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law”? Does that mean religious rules don’t matter?
 - c. In verses 19-21, Paul lists “the works of the flesh.” Which trait on this list is easiest for you to slip into if you’re not careful – and why?
 - d. In verses 22-23, Paul lists “the fruit of the Spirit.” Which trait on this list would you most like to have more of – and why?

5. The first and most important “fruit of the Spirit” is *agape*, a unique kind of love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross – unconditional, sacrificial love.
 - a. Here are some of the key traits of *agape*. See if you can think of an example (real or hypothetical) that illustrates what each trait means.
 - ✓ *Agape* is proactive, not reflective.
 - ✓ *Agape* is intentional, not emotional.
 - ✓ *Agape* is not based on what’s best for me, but what’s best for you.
 - b. In the sermon, we watched a video of low-income children being asked what they most wanted for Christmas and what their Mom or Dad most wanted. They were then given both, but told they could only take one home. They each chose the gift for their parent. What thoughts or feelings did you experience as you watched?
 - c. Has anyone ever loved you with *agape* love? How did their love affect you?
 - d. Tell us about a time when you have loved someone with *agape* love? In what way was your love sacrificial? In what way was it unconditional? How did that love affect you? How did it affect the other person?
 - e. Jeff said *agape* love is “generative.” What do you think that means?
6. Jeff offered two suggestions for how we can grow our capacity for *agape* love. **First, since *agape* is a “fruit of the Spirit,” the more Spirit we soak in, the more *agape* will naturally flow from us.** So if we want to *agape* more, we need to soak in more Spirit in our life. Input equals output. With that in mind, how would you answer this question: Am I putting myself in places and situations and activities and around people that feed a positive and beautiful Spirit within me? Do I need to adjust any of these inputs?
7. **Second, if I want more *agape* in my life, I should keep practicing it, even when I don’t feel like it.** This suggestion was based on the insight Jesus shares in Matthew 6:21, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” In other words, when we repeatedly invest ourselves in something, our heart eventually follows.
 - a. Jeff gave the example of watching golf with his Dad. He learned to love it by investing time in it. Can you think of an example from your life when you learned to be passionate about something by intentionally investing yourself in it before you actually loved it?
 - b. In your life right now, who is someone you want to practice showing more *agape*? What are some examples of what it might look like to show that person more *agape*?
 - c. Jesus said, “Give and you shall receive.” Luke 6:38. What do you think that means when it comes to *agape*?