

## Cross-Shaped Love

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Rich Nathan

April 9 & 10, 2016

The Father Loves You

Romans 5:5-8

If someone was to come up on the street and ask you, “How would you define love?” What would you say? Does it matter what the object of the love is? If we’re talking about loving chocolate or loving ice cream vs. loving a person – would your definition of love be different? If we are talking about being “in love” with someone you plan to marry vs. the love you may feel for your grandmother.

If you go online to the fount of all wisdom, Dr. Google, you’ll find thousands of definitions of love. Here’s a definition of love from a theoretical physicist named Jim Al-Khalili. He said this,

“Love is basically chemistry. While lust is a temporary passionate sexual desire involving the increased release of chemicals such as testosterone and estrogen, in true love, or attachment and bonding, the brain can release a whole set of chemicals: pheromones, dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin and oxytocin. However, from an evolutionary perspective, love can be viewed as a survival tool – a mechanism we evolved to promote long-term relationships, mutual defense and parental support of children and to promote feelings of safety and security.”

So the poets and the songwriters and writers of scripture and anyone who has ever been in love since the beginning of time are all wrong. Love has nothing to do with your decisions or your behavior or your feelings, it’s all chemicals swishing around in your body that you have no control over. What is love?

In his wonderful book titled, *The Four Loves*, one of my favorite books on love, the great English writer C.S. Lewis said essentially that the English word love is too imprecise. It covers everything from being “in love” to loving Buckeye football. We talk about loving a movie, loving an old comfortable sweatshirt, and in the same breath we talk about God loving us.

What do these uses of love have in common? Not a lot. Lewis went back to the Greeks who distinguished between four types of love. There is

Storge = Family Love or Affection

Storge is the kind of attachment or affection that’s not just found in people. As Lewis points out,

The image we must start with is that of a mother nursing a baby, a dog or a cat with a basket full of puppies or kittens; all in a squeaking, nuzzling heap together; purrings, lickings, baby-talk, milk, warmth, the smell of young life.

Puppies in a basket licking one another. It reminds me of Vineyard Columbus when we first got started.

The second kind of love. After Storge, family affection is

Phileo = Friendship Love

Lewis wasn't talking about "friending" someone on Facebook. Lewis defines friendship love as two people standing side by side absorbed in a common interest. Lovers are absorbed with each other. They stand face-to-face. Friends, Lewis says, stand side-by-side absorbed in something else – a common love for football, a common interest in helping kids or collecting Hummels, or best of all, a common love for God.

Then there's

Eros = Being "in love"

When we talk about eros we mean the kind of love that lovers are in.

And finally there is

Agape = Divine Gift-Love

Here's what Lewis says,

"Divine Gift-Love in [a person] enables him to love what is not naturally lovable; lepers, criminals, enemies, the sulky, the superior, and the sneering."

What is love? We've heard from a scientist, from a great writer and thinker – let's hear from children.

Here's a boy named Carl, age 5, he says

"Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and go out and smell each other."

What is love? Cindy, age 8, said

“During my piano recital I was on stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and saw my Daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. I wasn’t scared anymore.”

Elaine, age 5

“Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken.”

Mary Ann, age 4

“Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.”

Karen, age 7

“When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you.”

Here’s some children talking about love.

Video

In the New Testament, people’s definition of love was revolutionized by God giving his son to die on a cross for our sins. Here’s what we read in 1 John 3:16

1 John 3:16

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

In other words, while everyone in the world has a definition of love, the Apostle John claims that apart from Christ and his cross we would never know what love is. In Christianity, love is cross-shaped. When Christians define what love is we don’t go to a dictionary, we go to the cross!

As I continue this series titled, “The Father Loves You”, my message today is titled, “Cross-Shaped Love”.

Let’s Pray

Romans 5:5-8

<sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The thing about cross-shaped love is that it is shocking!

## The Shock of Cross-Shaped Love

In 1 John 4:7-8 we read

1 John 4:7-8

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Here is the distilled essence of Christianity. It all boils down to this core – God is love. When I do a series titled “The Father Loves You” it’s all rooted in this very simple and yet very profound statement: God is love.

Because “God is love” is so common place in our culture [I mean you can't read a letter to the Editor without someone raising that as an argument for why we should tolerate this or that. You know, "Well, a loving God, the God of love would never condemn this or would always say that."...]...because it is so common place to say that God is love, we may be under the impression that it is a self-evident proposition. That anyone who even thought about God immediately came to the conclusion that is stated here in 1 John 4:8 and, then, again in verse 16, "God is love." But, I want to tell you at the front end, that it is not at all self-evident that God is love. It is not self-evident if you look at history and the history of major religions.

Cross-Shaped Love is shocking to people in history

One scholar said that apart from the redeeming action of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, people in history saw no ground whatsoever for believing in a God of love.

Listen to me, the only religion that has ever come on the scene and had the audacity to say, "God is love" is Christianity. It may seem like a self-evident proposition to you today, but before Christianity said that, we find not a shred of evidence in any of the other religions of the world that people looked up at the sky and said, "Yes, as we think about God, we are going to define him by love."

When you look at the gods and goddesses that have been worshipped in the history of the world, folks have projected up to the sky a whole range of virtues and vices. They have talked about gods as being the god of justice and the god of war (like Mars); the goddess of wisdom (like Athena). There have been gods and goddesses of sex and romance (you know, Cupid and Aphrodite and Venus). But it is utterly inconceivable that ancient men and women, Greeks, Romans, Persians, or even the more contemporary religions, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims—it is inconceivable that they would ever say about their God, bottom line, the core of our religion boils down to these three words: God is love.

Impossible. Allah is love? No. The vast majority of Muslims, other than those in the mystical, Sufi tradition, would say, "He is just. He is merciful. He is most gracious. He is omnipotent. But we would not say he is love." Vishnu is love? No way. Buddha is love? He is enlightened. He is all wise. But we would not say he is love. Nor would we say, that Jupiter is love, or Thor is love, or Baal is love.

Even for Jews reading the Hebrew Bible, Jews would say from the Old Testament that God is loving just as a Jew would say that God is holy. God is good. God is just. But God is love? I remember one of my religion professors at Case, who was a rabbi, saying he couldn't wrap his head around what Christians even mean by that statement, "God is love." It sounds so sentimental.

Christianity stands unique among all of the religions of the world when we say that God is love. And because we have been affected by a Christian culture and Christian terminology, this proposition doesn't strike us as shocking and as startling as it would in the first century of the church. No one thought of God that way before Jesus Christ's death on a cross shockingly revealed God to be love.

Cross-Shaped Love is shocking to people in the Bible

While people in the Old Testament did not have the full revelation of God's love shown at the cross, they saw it pre-figured in the prophets.

Here's what we read

Jeremiah 31:3

"I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

People used to write Bible verses on cards and put them on their refrigerator or in their office space. I don't see folks do that much anymore. But Jeremiah 31:3 is one of those memory verses. And, again, we hear people say, "Of course God the Father loves me. After all, God is love."

But we must read Jeremiah 31:3 in context. Jeremiah for 30 chapters accuses Israel of going after other lovers, of worshipping the sun and the moon and the stars, of bowing down in front of idols, of turning their back on the Lord. Jeremiah says that the nation of Israel loves to wander and pursues every strange lover. Having for 30 chapters described Israel as a spiritually adulterous nation, an idolatrous generation, Jeremiah gets to chapter 31:3 and says,

Jeremiah 31:3

“I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

That’s not the natural conclusion of 30 chapters of condemnation. Or we read God’s instruction to the prophet Hosea in

Hosea 1:2

When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.”

Then Hosea’s wife turns back to adultery, she goes back to prostitution. God’s shocking message to the prophet Hosea is “I want you to go after her. Buy her out of prostitution and live with her again because that’s what I’m going to do with my people Israel.” And despite Israel’s many spiritual adulteries, their idolatry, then playing the role of a spiritual prostitute before God – God says these shocking words through the prophet Hosea.

Hosea 2:19-20

<sup>19</sup> I will betroth you to me forever;  
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,  
in love and compassion.  
<sup>20</sup> I will betroth you in faithfulness,  
and you will acknowledge the LORD.

God’s love for the unlovable. God’s love for people who have committed spiritual adultery, whose hearts have wandered far away from God. The cross-shaped love of God is shocking. It’s shocking to people in history, it was never thought of before Christ died on a cross. It was shocking to people in the Bible and

Cross-Shaped Love is shocking to us once we read the Bible’s description of us

How do we know that God the Father loves us? The Apostle Paul in Romans 5:8 says

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

You and I do wrong things. We rebel. We disobey God. We don’t even maintain our own standards, much less God’s standards. Does God continue to love us even when we’re disobedient? Paul’s answer is “yes”.

Because God, knowing what he knows about us, God who is under no illusions concerning us, because while we may fool others into thinking that we are better than we are, or more loving than we are – while we may fool others and we may even fool ourselves, God is not fooled. Yet knowing what God knows about us and seeing what God sees, God still sent his Son to die on a cross for us.

What does God know about us? Look at the four words the Apostle Paul uses to describe you and me.

Romans 5:6

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:10

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Listen to the description that Paul gives us. He says: While we were powerless, while we were ungodly, while we were sinners, while we were enemies of God, God demonstrates his love for us by sending his beloved Son to die for us.

You know, there are really two very different approaches to helping people build a foundation for living well, living the Good Life. One approach is what I'd call the therapeutic approach. A person comes in feeling really bad, bad about their choices. They feel bad about how they've been treated. They feel bad about where they are in life. Maybe even what they look like. A therapist or a friend will come along and try to build that person up. "You're really great! You have so many great qualities. You have a beautiful smile. You've done so many kind things for others. You need to start believing that you really are a wonderful person worthy of everyone else's respect and esteem."

The person goes out smiling, but the next day experiences so many negative things. Maybe they get some negative feedback from their boss. They have another brutal conversation with their mom. Or a boyfriend or girlfriend breaks up with them or they look inside and see so many bad things. They feel like garbage again. The approach of trying to feel ok by lifting yourself up is ultimately doomed to failure – it's building your life on quicksand. Because every time something bad happens to you or you look inside and you're honest about yourself you're going to feel really awful again.

You know, brothers and sisters, the Good News of the Gospel message is not designed to build your or my self-esteem. The gospel message does not say, “Look, people, you are really amazing! You just don’t realize it! You are incredible. That’s why God loves you.” The gospel that Jesus preached, the gospel that Paul preached, the gospel that we read about in the whole New Testament is not designed to build human self-esteem at all. It is designed to build up God-esteem in our eyes. So much of our lives are spent trying to feel good about ourselves based upon what others think of us. So-and-so complimented me; I just got a raise; I was just out on a date; someone likes me; I just got my name in the paper; the teacher gave me an A – so much of our sense of self-worth is built upon what others think of us, or what we think of ourselves.

What an insecure foundation. Talk about being on a roller coaster. Because we become instantly insecure when we inevitably find ourselves less than someone else on a comparative basis. You are less successful than your brother or sister, or friend. Your job is not as good. Your career path not as wonderful. Your husband is less successful; he is always struggling to make it at work while your sister, your brother, your friend is flying around the world with no financial problems. Your house is not as nice as someone else’s. Your kids are not as smart or as good in sports, or as healthy. Or your kids have real problems growing up, but your friends’ kids are doing amazing. They love God; they’re going to medical school. Other people are asked out on dates, but you aren’t. They’re married; you’re not. We’re always trying to find a basis of worth and security by looking at what others think of us and how we stack up on a comparative basis compared to others and what we think of ourselves.

The gospel gives us a much more secure foundation for living. But it does so not by lifting us up, but by lifting God’s cross-shaped love up. The gospel that Paul preached in the Book of Romans comes back over and over and over again to two central truths.

Truth #1:

We are way worse than we fear

Truth #2:

God loves us way more than we imagine

We are way worse than we fear; and God our Father loves us way more than we imagine. Let’s look at these descriptions of who we are. We are way worse than we fear. Paul says:

We are powerless

Romans 5:6

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.



We're weak. This word was used in the ancient world to describe someone who was physically ill. The picture is of someone who is deathly ill in a hospital bed, maybe someone who has gone through a dreadful round of chemo. They're completely spent; they're hanging over a toilet throwing up. They're laid up in bed with a 104° fever. Paul extends this idea of the physically weak and spiritually ill. He says that we are powerless. Some translations say that we are weak.

The idea that Paul is driving at is what some theologians have called "total inability." It is the exact opposite of the American "can-do" spirit. I can fix myself. I can save myself. Paul is saying that we human beings are totally powerless regarding our own salvation.

What are we powerless to do? You are powerless to understand spiritual truth on your own. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says this:

1 Corinthians 2:14

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

You may be brilliant. You may understand quantum mechanics or some obtuse philosophy. You may earn top grades or have a Ph.D. Do you struggle to believe in God? Do you wrestle with the idea that not only is there a God, but that this God loves you and sent his Son to die for you? Apart from the Holy Spirit, we are totally powerless to grasp spiritual truth.

What are we powerless to do? And we are powerless to consistently obey God. Do you not see this in your life, friends? That even when you know something is right, you still don't do it?

Dad's think to themselves, "I should stop watching TV and get off the sofa and play with my kids."

Married people say, "I should apologize to my spouse. I should end the cold war that's between us by being the first to apologize."

Or maybe we have this nudge inside that says, "I should call this very difficult person who I've been avoiding because they are so hard to deal with. I should call them because I know that they're lonely." "I should read my Bible. That would be good for me and good for my relationship with God. I should take some time to pray. I should break this bad habit."

Even though we know what's right to do, we often don't do it.

Why not? Because we are weak; in Paul's words - we are powerless and spiritually ill. And the reason why I would encourage you to embrace this identity of being spiritually weak, of being spiritually ill, of total inability is because of what Jesus said in Mark 2:17:

Mark 2:17 (NIV)

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

If you are sick and you acknowledge that about yourself; you are unable to obey God on your own; you are unable to please God on your own; you acknowledge that you are precisely the kind of person Jesus came to save.

The Apostle Paul says that not only are we powerless – we're way worse than we imagine, we are ungodly, in v. 6:

We are ungodly

Romans 5:6

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

What does it mean that we are ungodly? To be ungodly means that we are utterly unlike God. You put the prefix un in front of another word – it's the opposite, the negation of that thing. The Apostle Paul has already said this in Romans 3:23:

Romans 3:23

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

We were meant to live for God's glory; we were meant to reflect God's glory to the world, and we fail to do that. To be ungodly means that God's image in us reflecting through us has become defaced. In Genesis 1 we're told that God has made us in his own image and after his own likeness. We were meant to reflect God to the world, to represent God's good rule. But we're like a cracked mirror and our reflection of God out to the world is all distorted. We all look like a Picasso painting, a jigsaw puzzle of geometric shapes. We don't reflect or represent God as we should. We are powerless. We are ungodly. We are sinners.

We are sinners

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

To be a sinner is to fail to use things that God gives us for the purpose for which those things were designed. To be a sinner is to miss God's design and purpose for things. God has a purpose in mind for sex – to unite us with the person who is our spouse to communicate love, to serve another person, to procreate, to multiply the human race, to celebrate and to point a way from ourselves towards the joy we'll have with Christ in his kingdom. God has multiple purposes for sex and we sin when we misuse this gift of sex and distort its purpose.

We constantly sin when we miss God's purpose for something. That's what sin is. We miss the design, the aim that God has.

God gives us power and influence in order to bless and encourage other people and to build others up. And we sin when we misuse our power and influence to discourage others and tear others down. I think back in my own life of my own misuse of power, especially as a child, the really cruel things that I did to other children by misusing power. When I was about 9 or 10 years old, there was a boy who lived in a house that was right behind our home. He was a year younger than me. I occasionally played with him when there was no one else around to play with. One day I was walking home with a couple of friends from my own grade when we met this boy on the street. My friends started to make fun of him and were pushing him around. He started to cry. And I remember him looking to me to help him. But rather than stand up to my friends and stand up for this younger boy, I said to him, "Hey, don't look to me, you crybaby!" And I left him to fend for himself at the hands of these bullies. I failed to use the power and influence that I had.

We're sinners. We're sometimes cruel. We're cowards. We often don't stand up for what's right. We go along with the crowd. We misuse what God's given us. We misuse our power and influence. We are sinners. And finally, we are enemies of God.

We are enemies of God

Romans 5:10

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

We go against God's authority. We push away from God's love. We rebel against God's Word.

In other words, we're not merely neutral. We're way worse than we fear. The Bible says we rebel against God. We know exactly what God wants and we deliberately disobey. We are all at some points in our life like Judas. We're traitors to Christ. We're all at some points in our life like Peter. We deny Christ and turn our backs on him. We

are all at some points in our life like the Roman soldiers. You, friend, and I are personally responsible for Christ ending up on a cross. And yet, God loves us.

What is shocking about God's cross-shaped love is having clearly communicated in the most uncompromising, unflattering way about who we human beings are. The Apostle Paul says in

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The shock of God's cross-shaped love. There is nothing about us that draws out God's love. One of my favorite books that I've read over and over again is a book by Miroslav Volf, don't let his name intimidate you. His book is titled *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a World Stripped of Grace*. Volf writes this:

Martin Luther [the father of the Protestant Reformation] drew a contrast between two kinds of love, human and divine: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it."

Consider, first, what Luther calls human love, but which is better described as distorted love. It's elicited by the object of love; it is basically passive in the sense that it depends on the object of love. Its only activity, says Luther, consists in "receiving something". A person sees beauty – or goodness or truth – and wants to have it. As a consequence, people who love in this way seek their "own good" in those they love; they don't bestow any good on them. A man may shower a woman with gifts, but he may be doing it so that he can ingratiate himself to her, enjoy her, keep her, or even worse, so he can display her as a trophy. When we love in this way, we are receivers, not givers.

Contrast this kind of possessive love with the divine [cross-shaped] love. First, divine love never had to come into being at all; it wasn't elicited by its object. It simply is. It doesn't depend on the truth, beauty or the goodness of the beloved. Second, as Luther stated, because God's love isn't caused by its object, it can love those who are not lovable, "sinners, evil persons, fools and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise and strong."

Luther concluded, "Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Such divine love is supremely manifested on the cross on which Jesus Christ took the sin of the world upon himself." This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person.

Undeserved love, unearned love. We are way worse than we fear and God loves us way more than we imagine. Love that makes us not look at ourselves and marvel. A love that makes us look up at God and marvel. How great is the cross-shaped love of God?

### The Extent of Cross-Shaped Love

The extent of God's cross-shaped love is found by two things.

God's act of self-giving

Here's what we read in verse 8

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We always need to remember that the Christ who died on the cross was God himself coming in the flesh. God didn't say, "I love you so much that I'm going to create someone to come to earth to save you." God said, "I love you so much that I will personally come and save you."

How much does God love us? He loves us enough to sacrifice himself to give himself for us. Probably the closest analogy to God's love in Christ that I have ever heard of was shown by Father Maximillian Kolbe who was a Polish priest and whose prison cell visited when Marlene and I went to tour the Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz. Father Kolbe had risked his life on many occasions, offering refuge and protection for 2,000 Jews after the Nazis invaded Poland. Eventually, the place that he and four other priests had organized came under suspicion and Father Kolbe and the other priests were arrested and sent to Auschwitz.

In order to discourage escapes, Auschwitz had a rule that if a man escaped, ten men would be killed in retaliation. In 1941, a man from Kolbe's bunker escaped. The dreadful irony of the story is that the escaped prisoner was later found dead in a camp latrine. They didn't know this at the time. The commandant led these men out of the bunker, he screamed at them, "You are all going to pay! Ten of you will be locked in a starvation bunker without food or water until you die!" The ten were selected, including a man named Franciszek, who couldn't help but let out a cry. He began sobbing, "My poor wife, my poor children, what will happen to them? What will they do?" It was at that moment that Father Kolbe stepped forward. He took off his cap and he said, "I am a Catholic priest. Let me take his place. I am old. He has a wife and children." The Nazi commandant screamed, "What does this Polish pig want?" Father Kolbe pointed to the condemned Franciszek and he repeated, "I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like take his place, because he has a wife and children."

The commandant remained silent for a moment, nobody knew what he was going to do. Amazingly, he granted the request. Apparently, the Nazis thought it would be more valuable to have a young worker than an old man. They were happy with the exchange. Franciszek said, “I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned by what happened. The immensity of it. I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offered his life for mine – and he was a stranger. I never had any time to say anything to Maximillian Kolbe. I was saved. I owe my entire life to him.” God loves us way more than we can imagine. We were condemned, we owe our entire salvation to Christ who gave his life for us.

How much does God love you and me? His love was shown to us by his act of self-giving. His love was shown to us by

God’s act of pouring out

Here’s what we read in

Romans 5:5

And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

The cross of Christ is historical. God planted his love in time and space and if you were outside of Jerusalem in third decade of the first century, you would have seen Jesus nailed to a cross pouring out his blood for you. God’s love goes beyond what we see in history. Because God’s love is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. God’s love in history at the cross. God’s love in our hearts by the Spirit. God’s love objectively at a fixed point nailed to a cross. God’s love subjectively inside of us, something we can feel.

You know, the Old Testament talks about the pouring out of blood in the sacrifices of God. Here we read about the pouring out of the Spirit. These two things are inseparable. The blood of Christ and the Spirit of God.

When Christ died on a cross, blood and water came from his side. So it is now, friend. Christ pours his blood over everyone who turns to him in faith and asks his forgiveness. Christ pours his spirit out in everyone who is willing to receive him by faith. Cross-shaped love. That’s how we know that God our father loves us.

In a moment I’m going to ask some of you to stand in response to what God has done in sending his son Jesus Christ to die for us. God has done everything on his part necessary to reconcile us to himself. To establish a relationship with us that will make a real difference in our lives. What do we need to do to accept and experience the salvation that Christ has won for us?

First of all, we need to confess that the Bible's description of us is accurate. We are powerless. We are ungodly. We are sinners. We are enemies. And yet, the Bible says that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We need to acknowledge that what the Bible says about us is true.

Second, we need to believe. We need to believe that God loves us and that he sent his Son Jesus Christ to die on a cross to pay the price of our sins.

And third, we need to accept the gift of salvation. Don't try to earn it. The Bible says: It is by grace you have been saved through faith. And not of ourselves. It's the gift of God.

Are you ready to accept God's gift of forgiveness and salvation.

Confess. Believe. Receive.

If you're ready to do those three things, to begin a relationship with Jesus Christ that will begin to make a real difference in your life, I'm going to ask you to stand right now.

## Cross-Shaped Love

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Rich Nathan  
April 9 & 10, 2016  
The Father Loves You  
Romans 5:6-8

- I. The shock of Cross-Shaped Love
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  - B. Cross-Shaped Love is shocking to people in the Bible
  - C. Cross-Shaped Love is shocking to us once we read the Bible's description of us
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    - 2. We are ungodly
    - 3. We are sinners
    - 4. We are enemies of God
- II. The extent of Cross-Shaped Love
  - A. God's Act of self-giving
  - B. God's Act of pouring out