

## **The Most Amazing Race: A Race to Connect**

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Oct 4, 2009

**Matthew 4:18-19; John 4:1-42**

I do not watch reality shows. The only one I ever watch and even then not all the time is Project Runway.

However since we are doing this series, I watched the first show of the new season of The Amazing Race last Sunday.

How many of you watched it?

It was interesting.

The contestants for one of the challenges had to eat sushi with wasabi on it.

If you don't know what wasabi is – it is a very very very very very hot topping that you can put on sushi for flavoring.

My daughter, Jennifer and my husband, Kevin love it.

I – I do not like it at all.

It sets your mouth on fire, as was evidenced if you saw the show by watching the contestants who had to eat the wasabi bomb.

I love sushi but not wasabi.

So I thought to get us more in the feel of the reality show – I would have the ushers bring some wasabi out to each of you to eat this morning.

No I am just kidding.

But as we visit our first “pit-stop” this morning I wanted to share with you some things I did notice in common about the reality show The Amazing Race and our reality of running the Most Amazing Race.

Our first “pit-stop” if you recall from Pastor Chris’s sermon last week is:

[Connecting with God and others. \(Pit-stop #1\)](#)

On the TV show The Amazing Race, their god, so to speak, is the producers.

They say how the show is going to be played, how it is written, how it is carried out.

They are the great CREATOR.

And they even give the players a guide to follow in the person of the show’s host.

However, if you have watched the show, you will see that their guide doesn't really give them much help.

He simply tells them where to go.

The contestants have to figure out how they are going to get there, what that will require from them and so on.

And then at the end of the show only one couple wins the race.

Everyone else is eliminated and sent away.

In contrast to that – in our MOST AMAZING RACE, God is our CREATOR.

He created this whole universe in which we play, he fashioned each and every person in this universe.

The difference is that our God did it out of LOVE not greed.

God loves us and wants us to love him.

He wants a connection between him and us; he wants us to be joined together, HE WANTS US TO LOVE HIM because he first loved us.

And God knew we would need help too.

So out of his love for us, he gave us a great map to follow – the BIBLE.

He also knew we would need a guide – so he sent us his love in the form of Jesus, his only Son.

**Look with me this morning at what Jesus did for us as our guide.  
Turn to Matthew 4:18-19.**

Jesus didn't just hand us a card that said destination HEAVEN – figure it out.

He said, "FOLLOW ME."

Follow me and I will show you how to get there, I will show you how to connect with God, I will show you how to love.

You see in Jesus day when a rabbi or great teacher let you follow him, that meant he let you literally follow him around day in and day out all the time.

You would observe the rabbi and imitate him.

But when Jesus said to follow him, he was not talking about the usual student/teacher role.

He gave his students or disciples some techniques to follow.

Because Jesus didn't just want to be imitated, he wanted his followers to carry on his father's work when he was gone, he wanted his followers to be as connected to his father as he was, he wanted his followers to love God as he did.

So when Jesus said, "Follow Me."

He meant:

[Accept ME as authority.](#)

Throughout the gospel of Matthew, you will find that the struggle between Jesus and the religious leaders often revolved around this issue of authority.

The religious leaders wanted what we want today- outward signs.

Titles, education, position, connections.

Show us why you are authority.

However Jesus' authority came from who he was – he was God's son.

Not only was Jesus the final word, he was the word.

Lots of people heard what Jesus had to say, but they didn't accept him as authority.

Those who accepted Jesus as authority not only heard what he said, they also put it into practice.

To follow Jesus meant to:

[Pursue his calling.](#)

Luke 4:18-19 tells us that Jesus said he had come to “preach Good News to the poor, proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors.

If we are to follow Jesus and love God as he loved God then we are to do the same. And if we follow Jesus we will

Model after his example.

We will do what he did, we will show compassion as he showed compassion, we will boldly share the Good News as he shared the Good News, we will love as he loved not only God but others.

Look with me at Look at John 4:1-42 for a moment.

This is a long story so I am not going to read the whole thing this morning.

Instead I am going to give you the condensed version of it, because it is one of my favorite stories of one example of Jesus loving others.

And it gives us some techniques for how to love others and connect with them as Jesus did.

The story goes like this:

Jesus is tired and he stops by a well in Samaria to rest while his disciples go on to the next town to get him some food. Now no self respecting Jew would go through Samaria because the Jews hated them. The Samaritans were no longer “pure Jews” because the Jews in that land had intermarried with some of the foreigners from there and so were no longer considered pure. Instead they were of “mixed blood.”

Now a Samaritan woman comes out to get some water from the well that Jesus is resting at. It is around noon and most of the women come to the well later in the day when it is cooler and they can sit around and visit with each other for a while. So the fact the woman is coming at this hour is because she has a bad reputation and the other women don’t particularly associate with her.

As she comes to the well, Jesus asks her for a drink. The woman is shocked because first he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan and Jews do NOT share things with Samaritans. Secondly, he is a man and she is a woman. Jesus is reaching across barriers of prejudice to talk to this woman.

As they converse, Jesus tells the woman about herself. How she has had 5 husbands and is now living with a man who is not her husband. She tries to change the subject to throw him off but he keeps speaking to her of this living water he can give her. Jesus is doing what he came to do – preaching the Good News, releasing the captive, helping the blind to see. He is offering forgiveness to this woman and not condemnation. I imagine she had had plenty of condemnation in her life and this love and forgiveness is something so wonderful and new that she doesn’t quite know what to say at first.

She recognizes that Jesus must be a prophet. But what amazes her is that Jesus doesn’t ask her to do anything before he gives her this “living water.” He basically tells her this, I love you just as you are and I came just for you. Jesus meets her right where she is. She didn’t have to change, she didn’t have to make the man she was living with move out, she didn’t have to do anything before she could receive Jesus’ love and acceptance. She just needed to ask for the living water, for Jesus.

Then the woman does my favorite thing, the most outlandish thing. Once she realizes that what Jesus is offering is so wonderful and amazing, this ostracized woman, this woman who comes to the well at the hottest time of day so she doesn't have to run across those from the town who don't like her and who talk badly about her, runs right back into that same town to tell others about Jesus and to bring them to meet him. Although they have treated her badly, once she experiences Jesus pouring his love out to her, she runs into town and shares that same love with the others by inviting them to come and see.

In order to connect with others; to love others:

[Jesus reached across barriers](#)

[He offered forgiveness not condemnation](#)

[He met people right where they were.](#)

There is a modern story of this same kind of love.

It goes like this.

Ted Stallard story

There was a young man who was turned off by school. Very sloppy in appearance. Expressionless. Slow. Often times he would simply sit in class and stare off into space, unresponsive, which was an irritation to his teacher. Miss Thompson, who enjoyed bearing down her red pen -- as she placed big red Xs beside his many wrong answers.

Teddy was the kind of kid who strained the mercy of any teacher.

When Miss Thompson checked Teddy's permanent records, she discovered he had been a fine student until his mother died of a terminal illness a couple of years earlier. Miss Thompson's shame over her misjudgment of Teddy grew.

Christmas arrived. The children piled elaborately wrapped gifts on their teacher's desk. Ted brought one too. It was wrapped in brown paper and held together with Scotch Tape.

Miss Thompson opened each gift, as the children crowded around to watch. Out of Ted's package fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half of the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. The children began to snicker. But she silenced them by splashing some of the perfume on her wrist, and letting them smell it. She put the bracelet on too. At day's end, after the other children had left, Ted came by the teacher's desk and said, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother. And the bracelet looks real pretty on you. I'm glad you like my presents." He left.

Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her and to change her attitude. The next day, the children were greeted by a reformed teacher -- one committed to loving each of them. Especially the slow ones. Especially Ted.

Surprisingly -- or maybe, not surprisingly, Ted began to show great improvement. He actually caught up with most of the students and even passed a few.

Years later Miss Thompson received rich rewards for her effort, rewards that came in the form of letters from Teddy. One letter arrived when Teddy graduated from high school near the top of his class. One came when he graduated with honors from college.

The last letter arrived when he finished medical school and was about to get married. This is what it said:

Dear Miss Thompson:

As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year.

Love, Ted

Miss Thompson attended that wedding, and sat where Ted's mother would have sat. The compassion and love she had shown that young man entitled her to that privilege.

Although this story is actually a fictional story – something tells me that there are hundreds and thousands of stories out there very similar to this one that are not fictional.

I've read a few (hold up Bible) and I've heard from some of you such stories. I live out such a story in my own life.

Stories of lives that were changed by the love of God and the love of others.

When you accept Jesus, the living water, as your Lord and Savior then we are told in the Bible that we are given the same authority as Jesus.

So we are to pursue the same things he did: proclaiming Good News to the poor, releasing captives from whatever they are bound by – addictions, low self-esteem, jealousy, whatever – we are to help the blind see that Jesus came for the forgiveness of not just our sins but theirs as well,

We can only accomplish those things when we model the example Jesus showed us, the example of love.

[Love that reaches across whatever barriers there are.](#)

[Love that offers forgiveness and not condemnation.](#)

[Love that meets people right where they are but refuses to leave them there.](#)

**We are in a Race friends – the Most Amazing Race of all.**

In our race everyone gets the opportunity to cross that finish line a winner.

It's a race to connect with God and with others - to love God and love others.

And when we do that – we are forever changed, others are forever changed.

Love does that – it changes people.

In fact Jesus tells us in [Matthew 22:37](#) – turn with me to that passage.

Let's read it together.

If we are going to do as Hebrews tells us to do and “ **throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and run with perseverance the race marked out for us by fixing our eyes on Jesus , on whom our faith depends from beginning to end** - we need to do what Jesus did

And friends what Jesus did was Love God with all his heart, all his mind, and all his soul. And he loved others.

I want you to write across the bottom of your sermon notes this morning

The address of **Matthew 22:37-39.**

Under that I want you to write the word **LOVE.**

It is a great Word.

Don't just hear it though - put it into practice.

I was talking with Ben Lilly, our youth and UPWARD ministries coordinator, the other day about this very subject.

And Ben said, “Even my 3 year old daughter Brooklyn understands love.”

Love – we were created out of love in order that we might love.

Love God – our Creator and

Love the other people he also created.