

More Than Defined

Undeserving Love

Walnut Hills United Methodist Church
Sr. High Youth Work Trip
York, Pennsylvania

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repair – v. to restore to a good condition after damage.

There is a tube of toothpaste on the table in front of you. Open it. Squeeze half of it out onto the table. There are also toothpicks. Using a toothpick, put the toothpaste back into the tube.

How did you do? Did you get all of the toothpaste back into the tube? Did you get ANY of it back into the tube? No? Why not?

Sometimes our words are a lot like the toothpaste. We get the words out, but we can't repair the damage they create and put them back in. Have you done that before? I'm sure you have. We all have. Sometimes it seems like we just can't help opening our mouths and spewing out exactly what we are thinking – whether it's nice, right, or appropriate.

There are many sayings about words “cutting like a knife.” Sometimes you don't have to say words to hurt someone. In our info-centric world there are many ways you can use technology to send unkind words. Just think how many times you text, Facebook, Tweet, blog, chat, or message mean or cruel words. It's amazing when you actually think about it!

The tube of toothpaste reminds us we need to think about what we say to others. Why? Because it's the right thing to do. What do you have to lose by offering nice and kind words to the people in your life? Does that mean we are always polite and cheery with our words? Of course not! We all slip up now and then. But that's alright, because most likely you have kindness in your heart, and God knows that.

Look at the tube of toothpaste. Pray to God that you will be able to monitor how you use your words. Pray that God will give you strength and wisdom to hold back in situations where it might be easy to use hurtful words. Take your time.

spirit – n. a divine, inspiring, or animating being or influence.

Spirit is hard to describe. How do you talk about something that doesn't appeal to your five senses: taste, touch, smell, sound, or sight? How do you comprehend something that, by nature, is esoteric or ethereal?

For a moment, let's imagine a flame can represent the spirit. Using the matches in front of you, light a candle. After lighting a candle, reread the definition above. Do you know anyone in your life who is an "inspiring influence?" How about someone who is an "animating being" – meaning someone who compels you to do something.

No matter how you define spirit, you can probably think of those around you who have passed their spirit on to you. How have you passed YOUR spirit on to others? Think for a moment what passing your spirit to another might mean to them? How can we – unnecessarily selfish beings – give our spirit to others?

God passes spirit to us all the time. We feel it through emotion: happiness, love, caring, friendship. And we can act upon that spirit in everyday life: having compassion towards others, helping those less fortunate, serving people in need.

Take your time. Pray for God to pass the spirit on to you. Pray that God will help you to pass your inspiration and good influence to others. Thank God for the spirit of others in your life.

pain – n. mental or emotional suffering or torment.

Sometimes life just sucks. Things bother us. It's human to feel worried, overwhelmed, stressed, or under pressure. What do you feel anxious about? What is tense in your life?

Take a piece of paper and, using a marker, write some of these stresses down.

Letting go is a difficult task. Why do we hold on to the things that bring us the most pain? Maybe you're bothered by your family, a relationship, school starting, or any other number of things that plague us in our lives.

How do we let go?

Using a bottle of glue, write over your list of pains "RELEASE". Then, take a handful of sand and cover the glue. Tap the excess sand off of your paper back into the tub. You should be left with a list, now covered with the word "release." If you want, tack your list to the wall.

Take your time. Pray to God for help to release those things you can't. Pray for guidance in handling the stresses of your life. Pray for patience to deal with what overwhelms you. Look at the other sheets tacked up on the wall. Pray for others as they try to confront the pain in their lives.

reflection – n. an image, representation, or counterpart.

You are about to see yourself in a new way.

In front of you, there is a tub of glitter. Place your hands in the glitter. Try to hold a fistful. Let the glitter run through your fingers. Now imagine each piece of glitter as a tiny mirror. Can you see a reflection of yourself in the glitter? Most likely not. The pieces are too small to make a complete picture. Sometimes we can only see pieces of a whole picture. Take your hands out of the glitter.

Now look around the room. There are mirrors of all different shapes and sizes. Look at yourself in a mirror. Can you see your reflection now? You can probably see your whole face. We can't give God human attributes, but take time to imagine how God sees you. Ignore how you see yourself for a moment: that hair that's out of place, the zit on your forehead, the circles under your eyes.

Would God be proud of you? Ashamed? How about in awe? Would God say, "Well done"? Maybe God would look and see someone hurting, or someone rejoicing, or someone just being who they are.

Although we may only comprehend pieces of God, God knows all about us. Our picture of God is fragmented and miniscule compared to what God knows about our lives, our thoughts, and our prayers.

Pray about things only you know so God can know you better. Pray to know God better. Take your time. Thank God for seeing all the things in us we aren't able to, for seeing our "whole picture," and for loving us for who we are.

perfect – adj. entirely without any flaws or shortcomings.

Are you perfect? Read the definition above.

Are you perfect?

No. You're not. Sorry to burst your bubble. At times it may seem we do everything perfectly or that we are in the perfect place in our lives. But the truth is there is nothing we can do that is perfect. No matter what name you give to God, God is the only person, place, thing, or idea that can be perfect.

That doesn't make any sense, does it? We were created in God's image. Why aren't we perfect? We are human, and therefore unable to reach perfection. This may seem like it keeps us from being close to God, but God embraces our imperfections and loves us anyway. After all: God is love. Period.

On the floor you see a giant piece of paper. Take the oil pastels and draw or write examples of what makes you imperfect. It can be anything as simple as using bad language, being greedy, or being self centered. Draw more than one picture and be as creative as you like.

With your hands, smudge through your drawings. Blur the lines of your picture and erase what makes you imperfect. Your hands will be dirty after this, reminding you that you are imperfect. Over your smudges, draw a big heart, reminding you that God loves you no matter how imperfect you are.

Pray to God for help in striving to be more perfect. Take your time. Ask God to love you in spite of all your imperfections.

commune – v. to be in intimate communication or rapport.

Why do we take communion? Is it just a snack before lunch...to tide us over until church is through? Some think communion is a recommitment of our hearts, minds, and souls to God. Some think communion is the taking of the literal body and blood of Christ. Still others think communion is a quarterly, monthly, weekly reminder that Jesus died for our sins.

Sin.

That's an interesting word. What is sin? Do we even know? Is it being bad or not following the rules and laws that God has sent for us to obey? Do we know? Does communion take away our sin?

These are all questions you have to answer for yourself. Nobody is going to agree on what communion represents or how we should take communion. Take it how you would like.

Notice the different types of bread in front of you. Notice the different kinds of juice. Nobody says you have to have a nice, fluffy loaf of white bread and a sloshing cup of grape juice to take communion. Communion is different for everyone. Communion is the act of communicating with God...recommitting your heart to God using physical symbols. Everyone will have different pains, joys, and thoughts to communicate with God.

Take a piece of bread. Take a cup of juice. Take your time. Communicate with God through prayer as you have your communion. Pray about what keeps you from being in constant communication with God. Pray that these distractions will be taken from your life and you will be able to fully commune with God.

purify – v. to free from foreign or objectionable elements.

Look at your hands. Look at how dirty they've become.

Take a seat at the table. Wait for someone to come and sit across from you. Let them wash your hands, then do the same for them.

So, that was probably a little weird for you. Do you usually let people wash your hands? I'm guessing not. So why do you think this just happened?

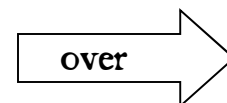
Tonight, you've been introduced to the idea of being undeserving of God's love. How do you feel about that now? Whether you think you do or do not deserve God's love, let's take this one step further. As soon as you accept that God loves you no matter what, you are purified. You are free from foreign or objectionable elements. You are loved.

What?

It's a hard concept to understand. God loves you no matter what. You are not perfect. You don't always accept God's spirit. You are in need of repair. You can't see yourself through God's eyes. You cause other's to feel pain. You don't always commune with God.

And yet God loves you anyway. Is that possible to do as a human? As a person who says mean things. As someone who is selfish and self serving? As a person who isn't perfect?

Think about it.



The point of having your hands washed isn't to make sure they are clean before you go on to the next part of your day. The point is to show you that you can be purified if you show everyone around you the limitless, perfect love God gives to you. Is that possible? One can only hope.

Let's look at this another way:

Love = God

God = Perfect

therefore, Love = Perfect

Love is perfect. The more love you show to others, the more like God you become. Does that mean we can be as perfect as God? Of course not! We're still human. We still make mistakes. But why not try being more like God in your daily life. Why not show those around you the perfect love you've been shown by God. What do you have to lose?

Pray that God will guide you through your life in a loving, fulfilling way. Pray that you will have the understanding and good judgment to show others the love that God gives you. Take your time. Thank God for the purifying love that is given to you. Thank God for your life. Thank God for your family and friends. Thank God for whatever is in your heart.

Amen.