

iLife, Part 2 - iLove: Seeing 'I' to 'I'

iPod – released by Apple in 2001, world's most popular media player
hundreds of accessories – NY Times calls this the “iPod ecosystem”

iLife – our thoughts about ourselves, others and God create our life!

Mark 12:29-31 (KJV) And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:29-31 (NLT) Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

iLove: Seeing 'I' to 'I'

In this series, we have been talking about the three relationships that Jesus said are more important than anything else in life ... your relationship with GOD, your relationship with OTHERS, and your relationship with YOURSELF (because you can only relate to others well when everything is okay within you).

Last week, we talked about this “iSearch” for victory within ourselves. We say “I Can't Believe My 'I'” when we fall into old habits that disappoint us, and we ask “If I Am (a Christian), Why Don't I (Live Like It)?” The key to victory is living a spirit-controlled life instead of a soul-controlled life.

Today, we want to move on to our relationships with OTHERS. The principles we will talk about will apply generally to ALL relationships, but we will specifically refer to the MARRIAGE relationship as our example. Why? Because it is the one God points to as a picture of His covenant with us, and because it is the closest human relationship (and thus, often the most difficult one to negotiate!). But remember these principles, when lived out, will be a blessing to every relationship – parent/child, church members, friendship, boss/employee, saint/pastor, neighbours, etc.

The biggest problem in every human relationship is that there are two capital “I's each wanting their way. So it requires constant negotiation if we are going to see 'I' to 'I' ... ☺

ILLUSTRATION: TWO BOXES – DESIRE & EXPECTATION

Contents of desire box: house, car, diaper, laundry, duster, clock, Christmas tree, piggy bank, nightgown, vacation brochure

What is the common denominator of all these desires? “I ... I ... I”

DESIRES are fine (after all, we're human!) ... but our problem is that we take our desires and turn them into EXPECTATIONS. Once we transfer them to the expectation box, we have lit the fuse for relationship conflict.

There are basically only three options when “I's collide ...

1. QUIT – leave the relationship

This is a cop-out; it doesn't solve anything. And it is why so many second marriages have similar problems – because you took your “I” with you! “Wherever you are, there you are!”

2. CONQUER – stronger partner dominates

Here is a secret about all human relationships ... It's very easy for ME to be ME, and it's very easy for YOU to be YOU ... but it's very difficult for YOU to be ME, or ME to be YOU. And trying to force someone to be like someone else is extraordinarily stressful!

When the strong partner CONQUERS the weaker partner is forced to CONFORM ... but this is a recipe for an explosion down the road.

3. COMPROMISE – draw strict boundary lines

This often seems like the best option to people in difficult relationships, because it seems to bring “peace” ... but the “peace” is really just an uneasy truce. We divide my responsibilities from your responsibilities, my money from your money, my friends from your friends, and before we're done we are in totally different worlds.

In this kind of relationship, we say “I will if you will” – but that is a CONTRACT, not a COVENANT.

Furthermore, the problem with all three of these options is that we end up with I-relationships, I-marriages, I-friendships, I-churches.

Did you know that in the Bible, we are not commanded to be committed to relationships, marriages, friendships, churches, etc ... we are commanded to be committed to the PEOPLE in them!

As long as I am dumping my desires on someone else (turning them into expectations), I create a **DEBT-DEBTOR relationship** (Barney song – “I owe you, you owe me, we fight like two cats in a tree”).

We could all build a convincing case to support our EXPECTATIONS, but anytime relationships degenerate into a DEBT-DEBTOR status, trust and intimacy evaporate because there is no margin left for the one thing that human relationships need most ... UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.

We don't give others any credit for merely meeting our expectations ... “Congratulations, you're up to ZERO now!” That's why you only get “personal letters” from businesses when you DON'T meet their expectations (you've never received a love letter from your bank!).

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE IS A GIFT WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED.

When I “desire” ... I'm grateful if it's done.

When I “expect” ... I don't even notice it, unless it isn't done!
No one gets credit, in fact everyone is just trying to reach the bar.

Every human being has legitimate desires, but you can't put the fulfillment of your desires on the shoulders of someone else!

How do you know if you've moved from DESIRE to EXPECTATION?

1. Expressions of Gratitude (when was the last time you said “thanks”?)
2. Acts of Service (do something that isn't even your responsibility)

Imagine a relationship where everything stayed in the DESIRE box, and the EXPECTATION box was empty! Imagine a relationship where each “I” concentrated on fulfilling the DESIRES of the other “I” instead of just expecting them to live up to a set of EXPECTATIONS.

When you fulfill someone else's desires, it feels like **LOVE!**
- a **CONTRACT** says “I will only as long as you will.”
- a **COVENANT** says “I will even if you won't.”

So the question is NOT “how do I eliminate my desires?” – that would not even be reasonable. The proper question to ask is “how do I move my expectations back to the desire box?” How can I remove the “burden of expectations” from the ones I love?

WHAT IS IN YOUR EXPECTATION BOX? This one question will reveal the answer ... **“What does your spouse/friend/church OWE you?”**

Only CHRISTIANS can really solve this problem in relationships.

WHAT DO THEY REALLY “OWE” ME? NOTHING!

A Christian marriage is NOT a marriage where you throw Bible darts at each other (using Scripture to try and control your spouse) ... that's just an **I-marriage** with a cross hung around its neck!

ILLUSTRATION: KEEPING THE OTHER “I” ON A SHORT LEASH

“I'm afraid they will ... if I don't ...”

Controlling someone with a leash is PARENTING – it only works TEMPORARILY where there is IMMATURITY in the relationship.

Ephesians 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Submission does not mean acting ridiculous by denying your desires. The solution is not to replace “I” with “U” but to invite a third party in!

Submission to one another means to PRIORITIZE THEIR DESIRES over yours ... not in reverence to THEM, but in reverence to the LORD!

ILLUSTRATION: CONVERSATION WITH GOD

YOU: “God, I'm so grateful to You – what can I do to show it?”

GOD: “Take all your gratitude and shower it on THEM, not ME!”

“Love THEM like I loved YOU!”

“It's not about THEM, it's about ME!”

“I want you to put THEM first because I put YOU first!”

“I want you to cancel THEIR debt because I cancelled YOURS!”

“Do it for ME, not for THEM!”

Ephesians 5:22, 25 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord ... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

Christians don't conduct their relationships in the shadow of two big “I”s, but in the shadow of the CROSS. God wants THEM to know His love through ME (my actions toward them are the physical channel for God).

That's why attending church without RELATIONSHIP with other Christians and INVOLVEMENT in ministry to others is not enough!

God was the first one who ever said, “You don't owe me anything!” ... and focusing on that is the only way to keep the expectation box empty! There are no guarantees when you show unconditional love ... but it is your only hope for that relationship! (Calvary had no guarantees either!)

At least, unconditional love creates the potential for a miracle ... because **following God's principles is an invitation for God to get involved!**

Romans 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

BUT WHAT DO I DO WITH MY DESIRES BOX?

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

HUMILITY is not responding to someone's rank, it is a DECISION to put someone else's desires above your own (it shows up best in conflict!). If we refuse to do this in our relationships, then God "resists the proud" – that is, He refuses to get involved and actually opposes our "BIG I."

However, when we submit to one another, we become "LITTLE I's" in God's sight, and the Bible says He will give GRACE to the humble. What is grace in this context? It is "ENABLING POWER FOR THE MOMENT."

To HUMBLE YOURSELF then is to (1) declare your dependence on God and (2) announce your obedience regardless of the consequences. But this is the part I hate, because God's "due time" is different than mine!

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

BUT WHAT DO I DO WITH MY DESIRES IN THE MEANTIME?

1 Peter 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

God says, "Tell Me about it, and don't edit your true feelings! If it's causing you anxiety, dump it on ME, no matter how small it may be!"
"IT MATTERS TO ME BECAUSE YOU MATTER TO ME!"

(USE OBJECTS FROM BOX AS ILLUSTRATIONS)

We might as well face real life and admit that some of our desires may never come true anyway. But if and when that bothers you, continually take it to God in prayer – DUMP IT ON HIM INSTEAD OF ON OTHERS.

Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

"What God did for me in DUE TIME was so great that I wouldn't trade it!"