

REAL LOVE

ME:

I want to tell you all about some of the things that I love!

I love food! I don't think I have a particular favourite food dish but give me anything that involves cheese and I'll love it! I love eating out, in London where I grew up there's a massive culture of eating out and I love it! Even though my bank balance doesn't love my eating out habits, especially seen as I am one of those people that believe there's always room for dessert. I am also one of those people that is willing to pay for a great meal out- especially if it's a brunch or if it involves Asian food, which I love- you can be pretty sure to find me in China town whenever I'm in London!

I love Norwich- I'm a Londoner (a real one that actually grew up in central London not on the outskirts..!) and I will always be a big city girl at heart but I love Norwich! I love how quaint and hip the city is, I love how pretty, it is, how quiet it is and I love that you're only a drive away from the beach! Despite the fact that shops close ridiculously early, that the public transport here is awful, that the city is so small (in my humble London opinion) that it may as well be called a town.. and despite the fact that I sometimes struggle to understand the Norfolk accent, I still love Norwich!

I love my degree- I study Medicine and I do love it, it's what I've always wanted to do. Now that I'm nearing the end of my degree, a lot of people ask me whether I still enjoy it/love it and I usually respond with a yes, sometimes the yes is more genuine than others! One part of Medicine that I love in particular is Anatomy, I love it so much that I decided to take a year out of Medicine to do a whole degree in it last year in London, yes I spent a whole year cutting up dead bodies.. and I enjoyed it.. yes I am slightly strange!

I love my church! I've been able to make Norwich my home because I am a part of this incredible church! I love being a youth leader here at Proclaimers, I can be very loud, competitive, energetic and opinionated/sassy as some might say and all those things are very important on a Friday night when we run Fearless, especially during tribe wars- red team for the win! Fearless is the best, I love doing life with some of the best people and getting to spend time with future world changers!

I love the idea of being fit and healthy, note that I said the idea of being fit and healthy. As much as I love the concept of being super fit and active, I'm not very willing to do anything to pursue that goal. Running outside is a complete no in this weather we've been having and I just can't bring myself to start going to the gym. This little girl pretty much sums up how I feel about the gym..

<https://www.facebook.com/BeFitMotivation/videos/1294708297318857/>

As much as I love the idea of being fit I obviously don't love it enough, as I know that it would require me giving up my time or my money, which I am clearly not motivated enough to do!

WE:

The word love is so easy to say. It's so easy to talk about the things we love eating, the things we love doing. We all say the word love, without even thinking about it. We all want to love what we do, love what we are part of, we all want to love the life that we lead but what are we willing to give up in order to make that happen?

We say we love our friends but are we willing to stick by them when they are going through a difficult time? Are you willing to show a friend you really love them by going through their tough times with them or is that when you decide the friendship is too much for you to handle?

Maybe you love your job, you work hard, things are pretty easy going and you like things at work just the way they are but when things start to change or work becomes more challenging, do you start thinking about quitting, do you start thinking about what you can move on to? Maybe it's your degree, you loved the subject at school and you loved the idea of studying it at university but now that you're actually in it, you're not sure you love it enough to stick it out to the end, you're not sure you love it enough to work hard in order to do well. Maybe you love your family but are you willing to give up your personal needs to ensure that they are cared for? Maybe you have a dream that you love, a dream you have for your future or your family's future, but are you willing to take the necessary steps to get there?

Perhaps you don't know how to love, perhaps you've never experienced real love yourself and so you don't know how to give out real love. Maybe you have tried to give real love but your heart has been broken too many times and so now you don't believe in love anymore. Maybe your past experiences have left you feeling indifferent about love, perhaps you're sat here and you don't care about what real love is or how we can share it. Maybe a lack of experiencing real love in your own personal life has left you in a place where you believe that real love doesn't exist, you might be here thinking that real love is impossible to receive and even more impossible to give.

I'll be completely honest with you love isn't easy, real love is hard. Real love is challenging, it's demanding, it's inspiring. Real love isn't just a word you say; real love is a verb. Real love is something you do, it is possible to receive real love and it is possible to show real love. So what does this real love look like?

GOD:

I want us to focus on the book of Ruth and have a look at the story of Ruth and Naomi in order to see what we can learn about real love.

Ruth 1: 1-6 (NIV)

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

- So here was this lady called Naomi, her husband had died, her two sons had died and she was living in a foreign land. It makes complete sense that she wanted to return back to her homeland, as sad as it was, she didn't have much going for her anymore
- Without a husband or any children she was in a very sad and seemingly hopeless situation, being a widow in these times was awful and so Naomi was about to enter into a period of her life where she would really struggle
- It's safe to say she would really need some people around her at this time, some people to love and care for her and those people were going to have to be her two daughters in law, Ruth and Orpah

Ruth 1:7-8 (NIV)

7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me."

- Despite her current circumstances, despite her impending days of struggling ahead of her, Naomi decides to send the only two people in her life away
- Strikes me as quite odd that in a time when she would need people the most, she decides to send her daughters-in-law away from her. The girls thought it was pretty odd too and refused to leave her
- But let's go on to read why Naomi was keen to send them back home

Ruth 1:11-13 (NIV)

"But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home,

my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

- Naomi is painting a very sad picture of what life with her would be like, if the girls were to go with her they would leaving their hometown to live in a foreign land, they would be leaving behind a better opportunity to get married again and have children
- Maybe you’re thinking that doesn’t sound like a big deal, nowadays many people move cities/countries and many people are single and lead happy and healthy lives
- However in the culture and time that Ruth and Orpah were living in this was a massive deal, giving up the prospect to have another husband and children would be a huge sacrifice
- In addition they would be leaving behind their own families, both girls had their mothers still alive and living in Moab so it would make more sense for them to return home. Naomi didn't know what she was going back to, whether she would have any friends to take care of her or whether she would even find somewhere to live. Choosing to follow her would be a risky choice to make.

Ruth 1:14 (NIV)

“At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.”

- Here we have Orpah, clearly touched by Naomi’s situation as she’s crying her eyes out but she decides to return home. Orpah had compassion but was persuaded that it would be a tough ride sticking with Naomi and decided she wasn’t going to stick around for that!
- Next we have Ruth and Ruth’s response to Naomi’s situation is what I believe is one of the most strongest declarations of love a person could ever make!

Ruth 1:15-18 (NIV)

“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

- These words that Ruth declares, these promises that she proclaims can only be a result of the love she had for her mother in law. Why else would she be willing to give up everything to stick with Naomi?

- She promises to stay by her side, she promises to leave her home behind to make Naomi's home her home, she promises to die in the same place that Naomi dies.
- Such powerful statements! But these weren't just words, Ruth meant these words with every fibre of her being and was willing to follow through on her words
- If you go on to read the rest of Ruth, you see that things turn out very well for Ruth and she goes on to lead a great life but there was no way she would have known that at the time she made those promises. Ruth was willing to leave her family behind, willing to leave behind the chance of getting a married again, willing to give up the gods she was following to follow Naomi's God and to step into a life that looked like it would only be full of poverty and distress
- The fierce love she had for Naomi meant she was willing to sacrifice everything, this is what you call real love.
- Real love equals sacrifice. Ruth sacrificed the chance of a better life because of love but there is one person that sacrificed everything for you because of love.
- That person is God, God made the ultimate sacrifice, he gave up his son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins because of love, because of the real love he has for us

John 3:16 (NIV)

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God SO loved you, that he paid the ultimate sacrifice. He so loved you, just as you are, with all your imperfections, with all the bits that you love about yourself and all the bits that you hate about yourself, with all the mistakes you've made in the past and all the mistakes you'll make in the future. God doesn't look at what you look like, he looks at your heart because he loves you. He loved you from the start, he created you in His own image out of love. Because he loves you, he wants you to live your best life, he wants to give you a hope and a future. God created you out of real love in order for you to show real love. God saved you out of real love so that you can show real love.

His love is unlike anything you've ever known; his love is perfect and gets rid of all fear. This love God has for you defines who you are, this love God has for you is an everyday, unconditional, reckless kind of love. This love is what enables you to show real love. **1 John 4: 19 (NIV)** says, "we love because he first loved us". You can show real love because you are loved.

YOU:

Now that you know that you are loved, how can you show real love? How can you love like Ruth did? It all begins with that understanding that God loves you and because of that you are called to love. I believe that there are 3 practical ways that

can help us love like Ruth did.

1. SPEAK words of love.

How many of us know that our words have the power to destroy or the power to give life? Our words have the power to either break someone down or to build someone up. As we are called to love, we are also called to speak words of love. Don't underestimate the impact your words of love could have on someone, whether that be as simple as putting a smile on someone's face or as life changing as bringing someone out of the depths of despair and into a place where they can see the light, into a place where they can feel love. In the story we just read we saw that Naomi was in a hopeless situation and she was clearly in need of a friend; Ruth steps up and promises to go where she goes, to stay where she stays. Can you imagine the impact those words would have had on Naomi, she was alone- a widow with no children, she was desperate and there was Ruth promising to love her, I can only imagine how loved she must have felt in that moment. Your words can have an impact on someone's life just like Ruth's words did on Naomi's life.

People are hungry for love, they are desperate to be loved, desperate to hear someone say that they love them. Better still people long to understand that there is heavenly father that loves them no matter what. Now that you know that you are loved you have the opportunity to tell someone else that they are loved unconditionally by a God who fights for them, by a God that gave everything up for them. Now that you know you are loved and that you can be part of a church that loves God and loves people, you need to share that with the people in your world. As Ps Tom says this church shouldn't be Norwich's best-kept secret, we need to get out there and tell people who we are and what we believe in. We need to be bold like Ruth, we need to love like Ruth did and speak love into situations that seem hopeless. We need to speak words of love, words that that have the power to transform someone's life.

2. ACT- put your words into action

Love isn't an emotion; it is a verb. Your words of love should not be empty words, they should be words that follow with action. As I said it's easy to say the word love, its comfortable and familiar. But real love isn't easy, it shouldn't just be comfortable and familiar, it should be fierce and it should cause you to act! What can you do for someone to show them that you love them? How easy would it have been for Ruth to just say those words to Naomi and then not follow through on any of her promises? Ruth had a home and her own mother to return to, she didn't need to follow through on her words but she did! Ruth didn't just say those words to Naomi and then remain in her hometown, she didn't say them for the sake of saying them, she followed through on her words, she acted on her words of love. Ruth didn't take the easy way out, she chose to act, she chose to show real love. Love isn't easy, real love is hard, real love requires action. We can love like Ruth did by choosing to put our words into action. How can you practically meet the needs of the people in your world? Here at Proclaimers we talk about having friendships that last for decades,

this is possible because of real love, real love that sticks it out in the good times and in the bad times. Maybe you are great at speaking words of love, maybe your life is full with opportunities where you are able to encourage people with your words. Can I encourage you to not just leave it there, can I encourage you to not just say the words but to put your words in action. I said before I can only imagine how loved Naomi must have felt when she heard Ruth declare those words so powerfully but imagine how more loved she must have felt when she saw Ruth actually taking those steps with her back to her hometown, imagine how loved she must have felt when she realized that Ruth really was going to go wherever she would go! We can love like Ruth did, love is fierce and it should cause you to act!

3. SACRIFICE

If we want to truly love like Ruth did, if we want to show real love we have to be willing to make a sacrifice. This is the most challenging point of them all, we can't just think about what we can do for someone, we must also consider what we can give up for someone. Ruth gave up a life with her own family, she gave up returning to her hometown, she gave up a better chance of getting remarried and having children, she gave up the religion she was following. That can't have been easy, in fact it must have been heartbreaking to say goodbye to everything you know in order to follow someone else but it was possible because of love. Ruth was able to make that sacrifice because of love.

Real love equals sacrifice. Is it your time, your money, your energy that you need to give up to show someone real love? Perhaps you need to give up your dreams in order to pursue the dreams of your wife or husband. Perhaps you need to give up your dream of moving abroad in order to take care of a family member. I don't know what that sacrifice looks like for you but I know that real love equals sacrifice and I also know that sacrifice is hard! No one said life would be easy, in fact Jesus tells us in the bible that we will face trouble but he encourages us to keep going because He has overcome and He will always be with us, no matter how hard the sacrifice we have to make is. Jesus gave it all up for us so what can you give up for someone? If we want to love like Ruth did we need to be willing to sacrifice. I'll say it again- we can't just think about what we can do for someone, we must also consider what we can give up for someone. However big or however small your sacrifice is, it is necessary, because real love requires sacrifice and real love has the power to change someone's life.

US:

What if we all loved like Ruth did? What if we did more than like an instagram post or a facebook post and actually told someone how much we love and appreciate them? What if we stopped talking about how this guy or girl has broken our hearts and started talking about our God who mends all broken hearts, our God who gave up his one and only son for us! What if the children and young people of our city went into their schools declaring that they are loved, imagine the impact they would have in their schools if they spoke words love. Imagine the impact our words could have if we put them into action, imagine what our worlds would look like if we actually gave something up in order to show someone real love.

Imagine what life could be like if we decided to look beyond ourselves and look towards what we can achieve through showing real genuine and authentic love. I think we could turn this city upside down. I believe we would see less broken people and more joyful people, I believe we would see fewer people suffering with loneliness and more people knowing that they are loved unconditionally by a great God. If we all loved with real genuine authentic love, we would be the most attractive people and our church would be the most attractive house- we would see people come to know Christ and have their lives changed.

We can make this happen, let's speak words of love, let's put our words into action and let's be willing to make a sacrifice. Let's go out into our worlds and show real love.