

CHOOSE LOVE

ME:

Recently I did a personality test called the 16 personalities which is based on the Myer Briggs personality theory (if you have no idea what I am talking about then google it!) I want to tell you about my result, I got the consul personality, which correlates, to the letters ESFJ.

What I want to focus on is the E bit of the 4 letters, which relates to being an extrovert, I am very extroverted (according to my results) and it's true I am a massive people person, I love spending time with people whether that be one on one or in a bigger group! I'm used to being around people all the time, I'm a middle child and so for my whole childhood up until I turned 18 and left for uni I had always shared a room with a least one of my sisters!

Being a middle child has it's difficulties (shout out to all the middle children) but you tend to always be around a sibling which is mostly great- even when I tried to escape my younger sister followed me here..! Anyway I am definitely one of those people that cannot sit at home alone for days without seeing anyone or talking to anyone. I am one of those people that tend to be pretty busy but I love being organized and I love meeting up with people and so will be very timetabled in my socializing!

Despite generally being a massive extrovert, I do also have those days when I am not in mood to be around people and those are not good days for me and they are probably worse for the unfortunate people that have to be around me as I am not very good at disguising my mood! I love people but when I'm having a bad day, I find it very hard to still love.

A few months ago I had one of those bad days, in fact it wasn't just a bad day, it was one of the worst days of my life. I spent the night in A&E with my younger sister after she had collapsed and had a seizure for the first time ever.. Now I'm a medical student so being in a hospital environment doesn't usually scare me but on this particular night I was freaking out! We ended up being in hospital to the early hours of the morning and she was fine when we left but what we didn't know then was that that night would be start of a very challenging journey.

The next day (Well the same day) I woke up physically and emotionally exhausted but me being me- I had already planned out my whole day which included meeting up with someone in the afternoon to chat about life. I was not in mood to sit and listen, I wasn't in the mood to be my usual caring extroverted self and so I had a decision to make- do I just cancel my day and sit at home or do I choose to meet with this person, do I choose to love?

WE:

You might be thinking of course the obvious decision would be to cancel, I mean it's not that big of a deal I could always reschedule when I was feeling better. I mean I had just had a very scary night and was internally having to deal with that so why should I choose to be there for someone else? Why should I choose to love in a time when I was feeling like I didn't have much to give?

Maybe you've been listening to these messages on love that we have been having over the last few weeks and you've got the fact that you are loved, you get the fact that love is a verb and it requires sacrifice, maybe you understand that you need to love the outcast and the marginalized and that you need to love anyway.

Maybe you get as Ps Tom described last week that God loves you enough not to leave you the way he found you. Perhaps understanding that you are loved and understanding that you are called to love hasn't been the hard bit for you, perhaps you're in a really rough season right now and you feel like you don't have it in you to love at all.

How do you love when you are hurt and broken, how do you love when you know you are loved, when you know you should love but you don't feel like you have anything to give? How do you love your friends when you feel lonely? How do you love when you're dealing with depression or anxiety? How do you continue to show love at work when you know you're heading home to a difficult situation? How do you love past your own pain? How do you love in the darkest times of your life, how do you love others when you're suffering? Is it even possible to love in those times; is it still possible to love when you're sad, when you're grieving, when you're angry?

GOD:

If we want to learn how to love through the difficult times then we need to look at the example of Jesus. He had loving through pain down completely.

We are going look at the story of when Jesus fed the 5,000, a lot of you would have heard this scripture- the miracle is often talked about but I want us to look what Jesus was going through immediately before he performed this miracle.

Let's read **Matthew 14:6-12 (NIV)**

6 On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much 7that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." 9The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted 10and had John beheaded in the prison. 11His head was brought in on a platter and

given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. 12John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

Park that story somewhere in your mind, I will come back to it soon but let's first take a look at the background of what this scripture is describing:

Who was John the Baptist, what his relationship to Jesus and how/why did he die?

John was born to Jewish parents, John's mother Elizabeth was related to the mother of Jesus Mary- so John was Jesus' cousin. John's conception was a miraculous one, both his parents were pretty old and Elizabeth had been barren for years. It was foretold that this child would be filled with the Spirit of God, even from his mother's womb. John the Baptist was a leather belt, locust and honey-eating guy who was the one that would prepare the way for Jesus.

John and Jesus had a special friendship, not only were they blood relatives, John was the man who baptised Jesus. John the Baptist was an incredibly influential man, he attracted large crowds and his message had a great impact on many just as it was prophesised to. Jesus spoke very highly of him,

Matthew 11: 11 (NIV) 'Truly, I tell you, among these born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he'.

In the midst of his ministry John ends up in prison because of this dude Herod Antipas! So back to the story we read previously! When it came to choosing his wife, he apparently stole Herodias, the wife of his brother Herod Philip-scandal! This caught John the Baptist's eye who certainly didn't agree with his behaviour and Herod didn't like John's disapproval so he put John in prison! Although her husband was already punishing John, Herod's wife hated John and wanted him dead, she really hated him but Herod on the other hand had this strange sense of protection over him.

However some time later it was Herod's birthday and his daughter did a special dance for him (weird I know..!) and he was so pleased he promised he would give her whatever he wanted- this was Herod's wife's chance and she got in there quickly, she got her teenage daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter and despite Herod having a soft spot for John, he ordered for him to beheaded. So John the Baptist, friend and cousin of Jesus, the man that Jesus called the greatest born of women was now dead.

Jesus' response to the death of John the Baptist

In the book Matthew it explains that when Jesus heard the news about John from his disciples, he got on a boat and went to head to a desolate place. Jesus wanted to be alone, he wanted some quiet time which is pretty understandable giving the news he just heard. He was not feeling like his

extroverted self, he wanted and needed to be alone. He was heartbroken and he needed to grieve. He needed the time to do so and more importantly he needed to be with his father, he needed to be with God.

Grieving is a process that takes time, the Elizabeth Kubler Ross model describes 5 stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. As Jesus was a 100% human he was going to go through all these stages of grief and would need the time to do so. But Jesus was disrupted in his solitary place, in the place he went to in order to get away from people! Let's read **Matthew 14:13 (NIV)**

13When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.

Jesus was really in need of some alone time but he was followed! Now Jesus could have easily run away (somehow) he could have turned the people away. He was grieving, why should he have to deal with people when he was going through a tough time? His heart was broken, he was dealing with the fact that one of his friends had just died, he wasn't in the right frame of mind to be with people but the crowds had followed him. So what did he do?

Matthew 14:13 (NIV) 14When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

He had compassion and he healed the sick! Jesus didn't run away, he didn't turn the people away, he didn't decide to sit in his feelings when there were people that needed him. He didn't decide that he was too heartbroken to give, he chose to get up and to keep going. And he didn't just stop there, as the day went on the disciples came to him with a problem.

Matthew 14:15-21 (NIV) 15As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

16Jesus replied, "**They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.**"

17"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

18 "**Bring them here to me,**" he said. 19And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 20They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Jesus had already been faced with the crowds of people wanting to be healed by him just when he needed have his solitary time and come to terms of his friend dying and now he had to face thousands of hungry people and his

disciples being clueless about what to do. The disciples came to Jesus with what they thought was a good solution- send the hungry people away.

What were they thinking? I mean if I was Jesus in that situation I would be rolling my eyes at them completely. They were coming to Jesus with a problem, the man who they had seen performing miracles after miracles and they were telling him to send the problem away! Maybe the disciples were just lacking in faith, I mean they only had 5 loaves of bread and two fish, how could they possibly feed thousands and thousands of people right?

Maybe they were tired, maybe they thought that Jesus wanted to be left alone, they were the ones that delivered the news of John the Baptist's death to him. They knew that Jesus and John were close, maybe they wanted to take the problem away from Jesus because he was grieving.

I don't know what was going through the disciples' minds in that moment but what is clear is that in the midst of his pain Jesus was going to bring a solution to the problem, in the midst of his suffering Jesus was going to choose to love, choose to have compassion and choose to put others before his own needs.

There are 2 things we can learn from Jesus in this story from when he first heard of the news of John the Baptist to how he responds to his grief.

1. Jesus turned to God
2. Jesus chose to love anyway

YOU:

What is your response to pain? What is your response when faced with an opportunity to love someone but you feel like you're not in the mood for it? What is your response when you're going through a tough time? Do you turn to God or do you let your emotions consume you, do you focus on your feelings or do you put your focus onto God? What is your response when faced with an opportunity to show someone love when you're going through a difficult season?

When we are heartbroken, when are facing hardships, when we are struggling with life, when we see no end to our current difficult circumstances that's when we need to turn to love. We need to turn to God and receive his love for us and that is when we need to choose to still love. There are two practical ways that I believe can help us when find ourselves in this position.

1. Turn to God in your pain

Pain is not a surprise to God, pain is not something God is immune to. Jesus being fully human felt pain in the same way we do. But Jesus also being fully

God meant that he was able to take on our sin, he suffered the ultimate pain and paid the ultimate price of his life for us. He did that so that our pain would be temporary so that we could look forward to day where there will be no pain and no more suffering. He paid the ultimate price so that we could turn to God and be strengthened to walk through our pain and to keep going.

He paid the ultimate price so that no matter how alone you feel, you can know that you are not alone. He paid the ultimate price so that you can know that when you can't see an end in sight to your problems, when you can't see a solution that you can turn to Jesus because he is the solution.

Losing someone you love hurts, Jesus was in pain and he knew that he needed to seek God, he needed to pray. We don't know how much time he actually had before the crowds found him, whether it was a few minutes or a few hours but what is important is that his first response when he found himself in a troubled time was to seek God. If Jesus needed to turn to God in times of pain then how much more do we need to turn to God in times of pain?

There is nothing that God can't handle, there is no pain that we face that God can't heal, there is no chain that God can't break, there is no situation that God can't make a breakthrough in, there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from his love for us. So turn to him!

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV) says: 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." When you are weak, look to God because his power can rest on you, his power can strengthen you, his power can make you feel strong even when you are weak. Turn to him in your pain, come to Him with your worries and allow him to give you rest. Living by your feelings will never sustain you but living by turning to God in all situations will enable you to weather every stormy season of life. So when you find yourself in a position where you feel weak or heartbroken, when you find yourself in a situation that feels insurmountable or unbearable- turn to God. Turn to God in your pain!

2. Choose to love through the pain

I'm not saying to forget about your pain, I'm not saying that you just need to stop feeling and get on with it. I'm not saying it's not ok to feel sad or it's not ok to cry. I am saying that you have the power to choose love, to still love in the midst of a hard time. You have the power to turn to God in your pain and then choose to love through your pain. You don't have to sit in your pain; you can walk through your hardest days and still love others. **Psalm 23:4 (NIV)** says 'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me'. You are walking

through the darkest valley, not sitting and watching everything fall to pieces and having a cup of tea, you are walking through and you are getting through it and your season in the darkest valley will come to an end because God is with you!

So whilst you're walking through, choose to love through the pain. It's hard to look past your current circumstances and focus on what you can achieve through the pain but Jesus did it and so can we! Remember this moment you are in is temporary but what God can do through you and through your pain can have a lasting impact.

At the start I told you about the day following one of the worst days of my life, I told you about how I was faced with a dilemma- I could choose to be consumed by my sadness, my grief, my emotion or I could choose to love through my pain. I chose to love, I chose to look beyond my current problem and look towards what I could do for someone else. I can't imagine where I would be right now if I firstly didn't choose to turn to God in my pain and secondly choose to walk through the worst of times and love anyway. I don't know where I would be right now if I didn't make a decision to keep turning to God in my pain and keep choosing to love through my pain. I know I am stronger for it, I know that I can declare with confidence that for when I am weak then I am strong!

In the midst of his emotional pain, Jesus turned outward instead of inwards. Rather turning to himself and being consumed by his emotion, he first turned to God and then he turned to loving others. There's nothing that says that Jesus wasn't still sad or grieving when he did the miracle, there's nothing to suggest that after turning to God he immediately stopped feeling the pain of the situation. Jesus was probably still going through a tough time but it didn't turn him away from people, it turned him to people and he made a choice to love. Jesus didn't let his emotion fuel his decision, he chose to let love fuel his decisions.

The sorrow that Jesus felt for the death of his friend empowered him to love and serve others. All that hurt, everything he felt he took it, he turned to God and he used it to show compassion to others. And how incredible was the result of his decision- the sick were healed, thousands of people were fed from just 5 fish and 2 loaves of bread and the disciples learnt an important lesson about faith.

Weaknesses, hardships, pain, suffering and difficulties do not make you exempt from loving others. The call to love has no boundaries! Don't be afraid to love when you are in need of love, loving others when you're going through a tough time isn't just a blessing for the person receiving the love, it's also a blessing for the person who's sharing the love.

The bible talks about the fact that when we give we also receive, that when we sow we also reap, that when we refresh others we ourselves will be refreshed. On your worst day Jesus loves you so on your worst day you can

still love. So choose to love on your best day and choose to love on your worst day. Choose to love through your pain.

US:

I wonder what our lives would look like if we got these two things right; if we firstly chose to turn to God in our pain and secondly chose to love through our pain.

What would your life start to look like if when faced with challenge you decided to turn to God? How much easier would your walk through your hardest and darkest times be if you decided not to sit in your pain but walk through knowing that when you are weak then you are strong? What would your world look like if you chose to love through your pain?

Imagine how different our schools would look if the kids that were suffering with low self-esteem, depression, anxiety and self-harm were the ones fighting for mental health awareness, imagine how different our schools would look if they weren't the ones suffering in silence but they were the ones choosing to show love while working through their own pain. Imagine how different your workplace would be if people didn't see you as the person struggling with a financial problem, if people didn't see you as the person with the terminal diagnosis or as the person with the sick child but as the person who decides to love through their pain!

As the person that decides to look to God in their hardship, as the person that declares that when they are weak that they are strong because Christ's power rests in them! Imagine if we all chose to put God first in our lives and choose to love no matter what our circumstance is, no matter what the situation we are facing is. I believe we would see a revolution of inspirational love, a kind of love that has no limits, a kind of love that has no boundaries, a kind of love that is selfless, the gritty kind of love that God has for every single one of us!

Let's choose to love, even when it hurts, let's choose to love through our pain. Let's go out there and shock the world with this kind of love!