



***“Being Real:
From the Heart”***
Isaiah 43
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I heard of this study, years ago, where a researcher found he could predict what marriages would survive and what marriages would likely fail.

He could predict this on the basis of couples’ daily conversations with each other. If the conversations were more frequently filled with criticisms of each other or negativity, these relationships were least likely to survive than ones where couples’ conversations had more positive, respectful comments to each other.

Dr. John Cacioppo of the University of Chicago suggests that our brains have a negativity bias. “Our brains are actually more sensitive and responsive to unpleasant news. That’s why personal insults or criticism hit us harder and stay with us longer.”¹

Now, you might think – well I can criticize my spouse or my child or my friend or co-worker and then make a compliment and life will be all better. Well, it doesn’t work that way.

For example – let’s say -- Joel says to me at supper time, ‘this ground beef you made tastes awful,’ and five minutes later, says ‘Shelley this chocolate cake you baked is delicious.’ The positive comment doesn’t cancel out the negative. Chances are, I’m going to remember the negative comment and the compliment will barely register.

(Now, this example is all hypothetical because Joel never criticizes my cooking – even the times it tastes like it’s seasoned with charcoal – then he goes back for seconds.)

Our brain needs a higher number of positive entries to counterbalance this built-in negativity bias. Researchers say in our conversations we need to have at least a two to one – positive to negative ratio in our conversations. And in our more intimate relationships – our marriages, in families, in our relationships with people we’re building community in the church – that ratio needs to be higher – five to one.²

When I do marriage preparation with couples, one of the things we talk about is how we communicate with each other and deal with difficult topics in ways that are respectful to each involved, that build each other up and help grow the relationship. – That’s the Gospel message – we seek to build up, not tear down.

¹ Peggy Bert, “Positive & Negative Words: Why the 5-1 ratio works.” *Marriage Partnership on Christianity Today.com* Spring 2008, Vol25, Page 26.

² IBID

I really value these psychologists research. But I don't think the psychology goes deep enough. We need the spiritual side here. I think our brains tend to have a negative bias because it's easy for us to get separated from God. Our brain, our spirit, our soul gets separated from God.

We are each a child of God, loved by God and meant to live our lives that way. Our passage from Isaiah reminds us of this: "I have called you by name, you are mine....you are precious in my sight and honored and I love you. (From Isaiah 43)

I think most of us don't see ourselves the way God sees us. We mostly go through life unconsciously. We don't think of ourselves or feel ourselves to be worthy, wonderful beautiful child of God.

"We see all of our faults and none of our value, especially the value God places on us. We hold all of our mistakes high and let our achievements fall by the wayside."³

When we feel small, irrelevant, unworthy inside, -- those are the times we need God. That's why it's important that we have time with God in weekly Sunday worship, that's why It's important we take time to centre ourselves in God. That's why it's important that we be part of a Christian community where we will be encouraged to be ourselves and to live out of this God-given love at the centre of us.

We've been talking these past few weeks about abundant living. And what we're finding is that abundant living has to do with making conscious choices in our lives

- making conscious choices of our attitudes -- will we be a positive person or a negative person – will we be an encourager or a detractor?
- Consciously choosing to live in God and to live out of the love God holds for us. Seeing ourselves and others as God sees us all.

The positive, Godly choices we make have a great influence upon ourselves and others:

There's a video going around on the internet – some of you may have seen it. It's about making positive choices that come from the heart. It's about being real:

Link to video: <http://www.stservicemovie.com/>

(Here's a synopsis – a business consultant does a seminar for a grocery store employees. The consultant tells the employees they can make a difference. One employee ponders these words quite carefully. His name we're told is Johnny. He's 19 years old, has downs syndrome and is the person who puts the groceries in the bag. Johnny goes home every night from work and drafts up a "thought for the day". His parents help him. With every customer, Johnny bags up their groceries, slips in his 'thought for the day' in the bag. Then he hands the bag to the costumer, telling them to have a good day.

Johnny's small positive act had a great effect. Over the weeks and months, the store manager noticed that the line in front of where Johnny worked was always longer. When he suggested to costumers they could go into a different line, they said they were waiting for

³ Debbie Macomber, *Knit Together: Discover God's Pattern for your Life*, p. 131

Johnny's thought for the day. Another customer said she came into the shop every time she walked by, to get Johnny's thought. Over time, Johnny's small act had a great effect upon the costumers and other staff of the grocery store.)

Johnny's actions were real, they were genuine. They were from the heart.

Small acts, positive acts, positive thoughts, grounded in God. This is what we are called to do. Thanks be to God. AMEN.