

the
PROVERBS 31
MINISTRIES
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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Lysa TerKeurst: Hi, I'm Lysa TerKeurst. Welcome to *Therapy & Theology*, part of the Proverbs 31 Ministries podcast, and welcome to my guests, not really my guests, really, you're my co-hosts, right? You are the brains of the whole situation that we've got going on here. Joel Muddamalle, director of theological research at Proverbs 31 Ministries. The reason I have a question is because really, you are our resident theologian, and we have a whole team of people who specialize in theology, and so thankful to have your leadership and your brilliance. And of course, Jim Cress, who is not only a brilliant therapist, Christian counselor and an amazing friend, but also my personal counselor.

Joel Muddamalle: Lysa, we're going to need this intro every day when we wake up for, you know just ready.

LT: Right, I need to do a voice memo and you just play it. First thing in the morning. {laughing}

LT: Well, today we're talking about a really important topic. And that is, what is motivating your love? What is your love motivation? And we've been talking about the survey that I did on Instagram just this week, and how the answers were so fascinating to us. So, one of the questions I asked on Instagram - If you had to define love, how would you define it? And we got some answers that were totally swinging in the direction that love is supposed to serve me. And then we got other answers that were still swinging in the direction like love overlooks bad behavior, and you're just supposed to sacrifice everything for love. We got one that I really like her definition, it's from Kim. And her last name starts with an L, Kim L. She said, "a feeling of connection coupled with caring actions toward another person." And I thought that seems like a more balanced approach. But Jim, I'd love for you to comment on your thoughts about this whole defining love, and some of the things you were sharing with me before we got started today; I just found so healthy and balanced.

Jim Cress: Well, there are different places to go. But to go to Jesus at least once, maybe twice, to love your neighbor just as you love yourself. And that idea of looking inside with a healthy love of myself and taking care of myself. And to put the word 'agape' in there. If one part of it, to seek my highest good, how to be the best me I can be that Christ has called me and led me to be

and then to look at the other person and think what might, and I kind of pause for a second, what might be really, really the best for this person, as I'm interacting with them. Because if we're going to be, to me, in the arena of love, to use some buzzwords, we're going to have to risk codependency that I will actually maybe out of fear of disconnection from that person, co-sign some unhealthy behavior. Or think I'm that powerful as a bit of an evangelist, that I can be an external solution to their internal problem.

And I want to, and I'll feel that on one level that I'm more powerful. And as I step over, over into kind of their side of the street and their circle, I will begin—guaranteed—like the emotional maturity piece, I will begin to probably not love and take care of myself well. I will begin to become kind of uncentered and ungrounded. The other extreme, you know, so we've got this sense of I'm going to work in love and maybe overlook some behavior. I think the other is just kind of saying nope, I'm cutting myself off. I'm over here. And in that part, which is sometimes not just a boundary, I can wall myself off and then stand behind the wall in judgment of the other person. There may be other extremes. But I always go to, for me, so love your neighbors as you love yourself. And then the 'agape' love piece, just pause—Am I seeking the other person's highest good? Sometimes if I do that, that's scary because I'm going to have to cut someone loose and have boundaries if I'm going to seek their highest good.

JM: That doesn't sound very loving, Jim.

JC: Yeah, see right there. At the other person's we know, we talked about in the emotional sobriety piece. If I'm walking emotional sobriety and emotional maturity, the other person usually will think very young, very developmentally very young. You're abandoning me. You're hurting me. You shouldn't have boundaries. You're not loving me; victim and they'll make me the perpetrator.

LT: Good. So, Jim, and Joel, I'm very eager to get to what you have to say too, but I want to ask you about the rich young ruler. So, Jesus, you know, was asked the question by the rich young ruler, basically, what do I need to do, you know, and I mean, obviously, he was probably rich with influence, he was probably really rich with leadership, he was probably rich, even in money. He was rich with worldly, maybe even pleasures.

JM: Platform for sure.

JC: Probably, seriously a handsome guy. I mean, he probably had that view of being a very handsome young guy. I mean...

JM: That's why the phrase young is included.

JC: Yeah.

LT: And so, when Jesus says, go and sell, in other words, go and give up all of these things, and then come and follow after me —

JC: Give to the poor, because what that calls is there to go and sell it, not to put it in some stock or in a coffee can. Yeah, didn't work, I'll come back. He asked him to do what the explorers in the new world did. They said, burn the ships, there's no going back. So, when he said sell it, but that nuance of give it to the poor, meaning I've earned, I've amassed all this to give to the poor, and I'll never be gone. He goes away sad, as we've talked in, so does Jesus and I make that if it's not too isogenical or too much of an extrapolation is to say, I'm in a relationship you are, you are whoever we're in relationship with. And someone says, I want to be in a relationship with you. I think the rich young ruler is earnest. What does it take to be in a relationship with you, Jesus? Jesus says, with his boundaries, if you will, here's what it takes to be in a relationship with me.

And we do that and say, if you want to be in a relationship with me, especially as we mature in emotional maturity, here's what's okay. I do a little hamburger. Top bun is this is what I must have, if you're going to be in a relationship with me. Bottom bun is this is what I won't stand for - it's not arrogant. You better have one of these. And the middle piece of meat is what's negotiable. Jesus says here's what it will take, of course, the rich young ruler goes away sad, and so does Jesus. So, some people come to us wanting to be in a relationship, they think, and we say, here are my boundaries, and they're mad at us or sad.

JM: Yeah, and maybe a real quick detail. It's not like the rich young ruler doesn't already come, in a sense, justified, like he has already lived up to a degree of the law. So, you know, there's also connotations here of there is this extra space that the Lord is calling him to, and where that is, is a space of cost, it's going to cost him something. And that's that place where the decision is going to be had or not.

LT: So, interesting question was Jesus being kind to the rich young ruler? Well, according to what you were saying, you know, if agape love, that highest love, is seeking someone else's highest good. On the surface, it kind of appears like, I don't know, if Jesus was being kind. Why didn't Jesus chase him down the road? You know, He let him walk away? He let a separation happen. Why didn't Jesus say, okay, you're not willing to give up everything? Well, then at least will you do this? Will you do this? Yes.

JC: Negotiate.

LT: Yeah. So, the question is, was Jesus being kind? The answer is Jesus is kindness. Jesus is love.

JM: Yeah, He's embodied love.

LT: Right. And so whatever Jesus' instruction to him, it was for his greatest good. It wasn't an unrealistic expectation and demand by Jesus. It wasn't for Jesus, actually, it was for the good of the rich young ruler.

JC: Jesus knew for what does it profit this man if he gains the entire world, but loses his own self, his soul, he loses himself, what a vision. He said, if you want to follow me, there's a kingdom much bigger than your little kingdom there and the money and the wealth, wealth you don't know about. And so, the idea of the vision He had, I'm moved with Jesus' compassion that he also says the rich young ruler went away sad, and Jesus was sad. The text also says later in other places, he looked upon them with compassion. Oh, Jerusalem, I wish you would do that. But you would not and he's just, Jesus honors other people's journeys. I get it, you would not. You're going to walk away. I get it.

JM: Yeah, and I think too, like, I'm going to take a page out of Jim Cress right now. I don't know if this has gone too far. But Jim I'll let you correct me, Lysa, correct me if I've gone too far with the text, okay? This might be a first in *Theology & Therapy*. But I actually would argue that the act of kindness of Jesus, is that he actually allows the individual to walk away.

JC: AMEN.

JM: Like it's, it's the actual consequence of the decision that is an act of kindness. Here's what we don't know, one day, maybe, you know, I'll write a fiction book, Lysa. I think we should write more fiction, but what we don't know, is what happened with this young man.

LT: Right!

JM: Because what we do know is what happens to Jesus. We know that Jesus becomes a mockery in front of the Jews. We know that Jesus becomes a mockery from the Romans, and he hangs on the cross. What is going on in the mind of a rich young ruler that walks away that is sorrowful, we don't know the seed that was planted in that moment, and that the kindness that Jesus enacted, that could have on the outside looked as painful, as vindictive, even of what Jesus did, as actually a marked moment to draw that individual to repentance, to actually see how this thing works itself out. And so, there's so much of the story that we're unaware of. But we have to trust that the Lord is doing something good for a greater good that maybe we love seeing the moment.

JC: I love that.

LT: And from a therapeutic standpoint, you know, I would also say, Jesus, in that moment was not enabling behaviors in the rich young ruler, that were not going to be long term beneficial to the rich young ruler. And so, then that makes me question the way that I look at love. And, you know, probably 8-10 years ago, I would have said, you know, you do need to just when someone is like, when you love them, you love them unconditionally. And I think this is a very Christian principle, right?

JC: To love unconditionally, is?

LT: I feel like a lot of Christians...

JM: It's generally taught.

LT: It's generally taught, love is unconditional.

JC: OK, because I've not found anybody theologically or otherwise, who can truly, if we're going to use that word, because our words frame our reality, who can truly love unconditionally other than God.

JM: So okay, we're about to get into a theological...

JC: Not my fault, if you're taking us somewhere, they'll blame me {laughing}

JM: No, no, no, this, this is so good, but I want Lysa to keep going.

LT: Do you see what I'm doing here? I'm asking the questions. I know you're asking, so I'm going to drop this little bomb. You're welcome, listeners. I'm just going to drop this little bomb; we're going to let them find it out. We're going to let them love each other.

JM: Yeah, what Jim is saying is so brilliant because actually what happens is, there's a theological conflation of ideas, right? There's a theological conflation, what does that mean? It means that we sometimes take a biblical truth in principle that is true uniquely of God. And then we subsume it, we assume that that has to also be true of humanity. But that is not how the text works. We have to be really careful when we're dealing with Scripture that we understand what is the unique, distinct role of God, His unique attributes? And then what are those shared communicable attributes that He graciously bestowed upon us that we're able to do to a degree in our fallen state? And so, would you just describe the unconditional love, I'm going to argue is a unique, distinctive attribute of God, that is not something that we in our humanity can actually truly possess.

LT: And I think this is important, because as I looked at the answers on Instagram, this showed up, over and over and over. And practically, what I sometimes see is that someone gets into a relationship with another person. And they start demonstrating things that they would call unconditional love, that if we're using the true definition of biblical love, that, in essence, seeking someone else's highest good, they're not seeking the other person's highest good because they're enabling behaviors that should not be enabled, or they're becoming so codependent on the other person that they almost become enmeshed, and they can't function without the other person.

And another situation that can easily happen is they set expectations in the relationship that they can't meet, and they definitely can't have the other person meet. And one time I was doing Instagram Live with Jim and I was talking about expectations, expectations, expectations, and Jim finally said, Lysa, let's talk about that word, expectations. You know, words frame your reality, am I doing my imitation of Jim really good, you know, words frame your reality, you know, expectations can be premeditated resentments. And I was like, oh, I've just talked about expectations for the last 15 minutes, you know, so I'm like, back it up, back it up, back it up. But there's all these dynamics that can come into a "love relationship" that I just don't know are being looked at from both a therapeutic and a theological correct view.

And so, I want to untangle some of this today. And so, where else, Joel, should we go in Scripture when we're looking at this whole, like, what is your ultimate love or your ultimate reason for loving or what is your love motivation? And Jim, I know you have something interesting you want to talk about regarding the five love languages, so we'll go there next but, what do you think?

JM: Yeah, I have a thought, one is Jim was so brilliant in saying, what does Jesus say, He says love your neighbor as yourself, which I love that. I think there's another thing that we find in the text. How are we supposed to love the Lord our God? Love the Lord God with what?

LT: All your heart, soul, mind.

JM: Okay, there are these three aspects of love. So, here's what's happened. We have the Greeks were brilliant, right? In many senses, in that they understood the range of a word can only be used for so long. So, Jim, we've talked about different types of love - eros, philia, agape, I mean, we can keep going on. There are these different types of love. Here's what I want to suggest that there's actually three ways of how we think about love. One is our orthodoxy, how we think about our love, our right thinking about love. The other is our orthopraxy, which means how does our love work itself out with our hands? How do we do it? And here's the third one that I think we don't think about enough, our orthopathi. How do we feel about our love? And how does it work itself out? And so, what tends to happen with love, is we isolate into one area, if it

was a triangle, and we had a graphic up, you're either thinking primarily about your thinking, but not your feeling, or you're thinking primarily about your doing, but not exactly about how the doing is going to impact other people's feeling. And so, we kind of tripartite our lives. This is a very Greek way of thinking.

LT: That's a very good word, tripartite. Where did you get that word?

JM: Some theology book.

LT: Seriously, we'll put the spelling of that in the show notes. Because that's fascinating.

JM: So, and this is actually this is Plato, this is Aristotle. This is Socrates. They, the Greeks, love to take our body and separate it up. But the Old Testament and the New Testament don't talk about it that way. They talk about one embodied human that is empowered by the Spirit that through the power of the Spirit, we're supposed to think rightly, do rightly, and feel rightly and I'm going to make a big claim right now and everybody we can have a little conversation here. I have come to the conclusion y'all that I don't think that we are primarily, and this is actually James K. Smith's, I want to source the right people. He has a great book on cultural liturgies, and he makes this argument. We're not primarily thinking beings, we're primarily feeling or desiring beings. What does that mean? If I were to stand up right now, and I'm not going to do it, but if I were to stand up right now and hit Jim in the face, this is very morbid, right? Whoa, like got aggressive, okay? Right. If I do that, I don't think Jim is going to first go, hmm, Joel stood up he threw a punch he hit me in the face I should now feel hurt and then angry and then like, don't you know? No, he's going to first have an emotive feeling over the action that is then going to work itself out.

JC: And what happened in that bit, I mean, it's that fast. Right? It's that feels like saw me.

JM: Yeah. And so, this is the complexity of something like what is our love? It's, we can't separate it into isolated little places, we have to think holistically otherwise, we will have a fragmented love.

LT: That is so fascinating. So, this gets into also, not only what is our motivation for love, but this other question that I asked on social media, I feel loved when, and overarching answer here just very, very, I mean, I would say the vast majority of the answers had something to do when people get intentional toward me. And that feels like love, and there was one she had like heart eyes and you know the little like emoji with the face with all the hearts dancing around it. And she was like when my husband offers to do the laundry. So again, intentionality. There are other people when someone lets me know that they've been thinking about me, intentionality. When

someone reaches out to check on me, intentionality. And so, I feel most loved when someone sees me, hears me, attempts to know me, right?

And that I feel like is what you're talking about. It's the, they feel something toward me, they've got a motivation, that's toward me. And it's not a motivation like I'm going to do for you so that you will do for me, right? But it's that someone's going to do something for me that they were thinking about me and they feel something toward me. And it culminates in intentionality. So, I think this is interesting. Jim, I want to turn a little bit to the love languages because I love Dr. Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages*. And, and I think better understanding how I receive love and I communicate love, or how people that I care about, how you receive love and how you communicate love. I think this kind of changed the game in how people understood the unique nuances of different individuals and how they best receive and give love. But you flipped it a little bit and said there's also something to be cautious of. So, I want you to talk a little bit about that.

JC: Yes, one of the things I see in love languages in my office all the time and I'm all for the love languages, very much, is it's kind of funny for me that people will give and not even recognize it out of their love language, like in case of a marriage to their spouse. If the spouse is a say acts of service, this person, but for me physical touch, and I do believe in these love languages, physical touch and words of affirmation are huge for me. I'm aware of that. So, if I get words of affirmation, I have to be careful that I don't let them go so high in me and we, it could be like worship. But I will, if I struggle with it, say with my wife, with acts of service. That's her love language. I think with my wife and my children, I know I do. I'm affirming them a lot, touching them a lot. That's my love language. And so, I have to constantly be mindful of what's their love language.

So, I watch people, it just is not natural, and organic to go, Oh, well, acts of service. I don't like that, or gifts or whatever else. So that's one thing is often we're not even aware that we're not really getting in that agape love and say, well, acts of service aren't normal for me, but you like it, so I'll do it for you. And I don't have to like doing it. But I know you like it. The flip side one day, I realized in my thought, in a counseling session that I kept hearing people, like the expectations are premeditated resentments. This is my love language. And if you don't give me that, I begin to know just resentments, or quid pro quo. Even literally, like, I know that's your love language, you don't give me mine. And that withholding, I will not give you what you want. And so, I thought, you know, really, say to cut through all the layers of this thing, I thought the flip side of a lot of love languages, I think ends up being idolatry. You'd better give me this. And by the way, I'll give you yours. But you better, and if that's my love language, and I don't get it, I think the same thing happens with enneagram numbers, not against the enneagram. But if I don't get this, so you don't respond in this way that I feel justified to fill in the blank. And that's why I believe the flip side of a love language can be idolatry. That's a thought.

LT: So, another thing that I want to just make sure we cover before we wrap up today is these terms, these counseling terms that I think are really important when we think about motivations in love. And you can have good motivations and you can have motivations that lead somewhere that that isn't good. And, and I think a great thing that we were talking about is what is that love taking you to? And where is that love ultimately leading? Okay, so I want to repeat those again. Where's that love taking you to? And where's that love ultimately leading you? And so, when we think about some unhealthy dynamics that can come into play with love and leading us to maybe unhealthy places is a couple of words. Okay, codependency. What is that Jim?

JC: Usually the old line is an addiction to people, places or things. In other words, I'm going to try to, I think its often people pleasing. I feel something's wrong, even if you were in an addiction, something's wrong with you, I'm actually afraid. And so, I will do things to you that maybe I think can pull you out of that addiction or get you more emotionally self-regulated. So, and I leave myself every time I do that.

LT: Okay, what about enmeshment?

JC: So, enmeshment would be, there's a thing you've heard of I know you've heard of it called you, me and we, ever heard of that?

JM: A little bit.

JC: We know about that don't we? We do our workshops on that, and so the idea of Martin Buber called the I-Thou principle. So, enmeshment is, no matter what the umbilical cord's been cut, right? So, I'm me, you're you. Here's I have three hula hoops in my office is the perfect picture. And I'll say it a couple, one hula hoop on the ground. You each hold a hula, show me what oneness is connection and marriage. Nine out of 10 couples will go, and they'll take it step over in the middle hoop I said, that's your relationship. And they'll go and totally over hoop each other and I go, you've lost yourself. What I do, by the way is have you hold your hoop, one foot in that and one foot out because there's always an individual. I mean, enmeshment is me losing myself and I'm so what we would call, I'm so of you, when I need to be with you, you're in that chair and I'm not over in it. If a person is different, like I'm almost just in an unhealthy way, one with you versus the separation. You're you, and I'm me. That's an enmeshment.

LT: Okay, what about enabling?

JC: I think enabling is anything I do where I'm a co-conspirator, whether I think I am or not. And basically, you're doing an unhealthy behavior, and for my lack of boundaries, because if you're in

addiction or unhealthy behavior, come on, you should do crazy things and unhealthy things. So, if I'm enabling your behavior, I am joining you or doing things to even help you or simply not separating myself and say, no, I will not go along with that. That's part of the enabling. It literally is me helping you continue in your unhealthy behavior.

LT: Okay, last one, narcissism.

JC: Well, we've done a whole podcast on that here. Narcissism, as we've talked about, is not driven by pride. It's driven by shame. So, there's that narcissistic wound inside that, whether they think they know it or not, I'm not enough. I can't be enough. I'm not even in touch, talk about love your neighbor as you love yourself. I know nothing about self-love. And I'm not okay, except I have the empaths or echoes all around me, telling me and enabling my behavior that I am the king of the universe. But I know inside, all narcissists know it, not a sociopath, but a narcissist knows, I'm not enough. And if you really saw me, Wizard of Oz, behind the curtain, you'd know I'm really not the wizard.

LT: Hmm. So, the reason I wanted to identify some of those words and really define them is because sometimes we're caught in a relationship, and we're calling something love that really is not love. And sometimes I think it's easy to slip into patterns in a relationship, where you're highly motivated to keep that relationship. And so, you start sacrificing the best of who you are, in order to keep that relationship because you're no longer loving your neighbor, as you love yourself, you're no longer loving yourself. You are saying, if I don't have this relationship, I will not make it, I will not survive, or I will not look good, or I will not function well.

JC: Well notice what you said so eloquently. You're now at the point, we're talking all this love stuff, you've left the person, whoever that person may be over here. And you're saying, I actually, whenever I love you or want to be with you, I want the relationship more. People do I want the job more or the marriage more or whatever. So right away, by the very narrative, this is not love. This is me saying I'm choosing the relationship over you. It's an actual disconnect. We're wired for connection.

LT: So good. So, when I chase that question down, yeah, you know, where's this love taking me? So right now, do I have people around me that are saying this relationship, it appears to bring out the best in you. This relationship, is that person seeking your highest good? This relationship is something I can get behind; I actually want to hang out with the two of you. Or do you have people in your life that know you and love you. And a vast majority of them are saying, I'm sorry, if you stay with this person, then we really are not going to have the same kind of future together. And it's not them saying it out of their selfish reasons, it's actually them, their motivation is their deep concern for you. Or they're saying, I don't think this relationship brings out the best in you, nor do I see you bringing out the best in this other person. And if you've got a

lot of people in your life that you love and trust, and they're speaking that into you, I believe it's time to either get a professional counselor, or a really trusted mentor involved to take a serious look at what is motivating me to stay in a relationship that is not healthy. And I see this all the time in dating. Now, of course, if you're married, there's some different dynamics that come into play with that. But I think honesty, and honestly looking at what is motivating my love? What is driving me to sacrifice what I'm sacrificing? Is it truly for the other person? Or is it because I can't fathom not having a "relationship"? So, Joel, any last thoughts you have from a scriptural standpoint?

JM: Yeah, I mean, a couple is, and you're getting at this, Lysa, is we're asking what is our ultimate love, in whatever it is, that is our ultimate love, that is going to shape us and form us. And so, I've got some favorite theologians around here. One is GK Beale, and he says this, "what we revere, we reflect either to our ruin or our restoration."

JC: That's good.

LT: Let's say that one more time, Joel because that's so good.

JM: Yeah, what we revere, we reflect either to our ruin, or to our restoration. And what he's ultimately saying is that that object of affection is that thing that we revere, and whatever it is that we love, it is serving as a filter to dictate all of our decisions, you know. And so, here's, I was literally as you were talking to this, I wrote this down, love is taking me somewhere, and along the way, it's forming me into someone. And the question that we have to ask is, is that journey and that object of our love forming us into a person that it's going to be like ruinous it's going to cause ruin in us? Or is it going to form us into a restored individual that ultimately would look like Christ?

LT: One of the comments that I got to another question we asked on Instagram, we'll wrap up with this. The question was, or the fill in the blank was, "I am most loving toward others when" and Paige, I actually know her. Her last name starts with a "C". She said, "I see and celebrate who they are, not who they are for me."

JC: Wow, that's good.

LT: And I think that's a really good place to land. Jim, do you have any last thoughts you want to make sure as we wrap up today?

JC: Two, really quickly. And Lysa and I've talked about this a bunch on the podcast on narcissism. You literally talked about Beale's quote there. And then what's the title of this incredible book on narcissism? The object of my affection is in my reflection, literally there. The

second one is this love, true love connects, and communes. And lust, and lust is not just sexual lust. True love connects and communes, lust disconnects and consumes. Check, run that through a filter in your relationship, you ever feel like someone's almost trying to consume you? Or you them?

LT: So good. Thank you, Joel. Jim, it's always, I learn so much in these podcasts. I feel like you bring the therapy Jim, you bring the theology, Joel and I bring the average everyday person with issues. And so, you're welcome. I'm glad that I can contribute the issues that I'm wrestling through and I know so many of you are as well. What motivates your love; great conversation today. Thank you so much for joining us. Bye bye.